

“Mama, what is a hospital?”

How to prepare your child for a stay in hospital.

Talk with your child about illness, accidents and hospitals in general, even if there is no imminent cause for it.

In the case of a forthcoming stay in hospital your child should know what to expect in hospital and what it will have to undergo. Information adapted to the age and development of the child will help to reduce anxieties and create trust and security. Sometimes it is difficult to find the right words. As a rule of thumb you should neither belittle nor dramatize the situation; impart calmness and confidence.

If your child is already older you have a variety of possibilities to prepare it for a short or longer stay in hospital. For example, many children’s hospitals or wards offer guided tours or a play program enabling your child to get acquainted with the place. Ask your child afterwards about its impressions, fears or hopes. Try to answer its questions as extensively as possible.

“Not without my teddy!”

How you can make it easy for your child to go to hospital.

For children of any age a stay in hospital is a profound experience. Quite often they become unbalanced and suddenly react completely differently than at home. The unfamiliar



surroundings and the many unknown faces are intimidating. They might be afraid of possible pains or of getting separated from their parents, or they are scared of the necessary treatment or operation.

That’s why it is the best if you or another care person closely related to the child are able to stay with the child. Bring along familiar toys, the cuddly teddy bear, the favourite puppet or the security blanket. It does not matter whether they are old and damaged, as long as they help your child to feel safe and secure.

“Don’t leave me alone!”



How you can accompany and support your child.

Even the best preparation does not make the presence of parents or another familiar care person unnecessary, in fact your presence facilitates the hospital stay for all persons involved. It is especially important in the case of an accident that you and your child have to cope

with unexpectedly.

For the child it is good to know that you or another care person will accompany it.

Babies and small children do not yet understand why they have to go to hospital and stay there. In such a case it is of great importance that you stay with the child.

Older children or adolescents might not be as dependent anymore on you or a care person’s staying overnight. Depending on the kind of illness they might nevertheless appreciate it if one of the parents stays with them in hospital. In any case the opinion and the wishes of the child should be listened to and taken seriously.

“Stay with me!”

Staying with your child overnight.

In almost all hospitals parents are allowed to stay with their children overnight (“rooming-in”). In most cases a folding bed will be installed next to the child’s bed. Being close to you makes the child feel less alien and it is not alone if it wakes up during the night. In a hospital you can of course not expect the comfort of a hotel, the important thing is that you are able to accompany your child during this difficult experience of life.

Not always are parents encouraged to stay. It might then be necessary that you express clearly and plainly your intention to stay. On the other hand, should you be unable to stay for family or other reasons, this has to be respected as well.

The payment of the cost for overnight stays, meals and beverages is handled differently from place to place. In some cases health insurances pay for these costs fully or in part. It is advisable to clarify these questions before you go to hospital.



“When are you coming back?”

Visits are bright spots in the daily hospital routine.

For children of all ages it is important that they are visited regularly in hospital and can enjoy the support of their family, friends and classmates.

With the exception of close family members, all visitors should respect the official visiting hours and they should not come all at once. Try to organise these important

contacts for your child in such a way that it can look forward to a visit every day.

For you or close care persons such visits are a welcome opportunity to spare some time for yourself and relax.

In the case of a longer hospital stay it might become too heavy a burden for you to look after your child alone. Don’t hesitate to ask grandparents, elder siblings, godparents or other persons of trust for help so that you can recharge your batteries.



“Papa, I am scared!”

How you can support and console your child during medical examinations or the preparation for anaesthesia.

Whenever possible you should accompany your child to medical examinations, take along its teddy bear, its favourite puppet or perhaps a book to read from. If your child is scared and resists against an intervention, try to reduce its fear with patience, persuasion or distraction. Don’t take the position of the “other” side. You are the child’s person of trust, who supports and consoles it in this difficult situation. Any form of restraint should be avoided, e.g. holding the child with force or fastening it with belts. Experienced doctors and nurses apply in such critical

situations various established strategies of distraction in order to help the child to overcome its fears. For example the examination might be postponed and during a little walk outside you can talk to your child and calm it. Or the doctor examines first the teddy bear. In many cases needles are no longer required or a locally active pain-reducing sticking-plaster is applied so that the prick can hardly be noticed.

During the introduction of anaesthesia and when the child wakes up again your presence helps the child to overcome its fears. However, there are still some hospitals where the presence of parents is not allowed during the introduction of anaesthesia or in the waking-up room. It is advisable to clarify these important issues before a hospital stay and to choose whenever possible a hospital that allows the presence of parents.

For family or other reasons parents might not be able to stay with their child. This is of course also to be respected.



“What can I do?”

How parents and care persons can contribute to the child’s optimal care.

The nursing staff should inform parents who stay in hospital about the daily tasks and wherever possible include parents in the care of their child. Discuss and clarify with the nurse responsible for your child what you are expected to do and what your own wishes and expectations are.

If after the stay in hospital certain treatments need to be continued at home it is an opportunity for you to practise this type of treatment guided by an experienced nurse.

You know your child best and you are the first person to notice if something seems to be wrong. Don’t hesitate to contact the hospital staff immediately if you think that your child is in pain or reacts in an unusual way.

If you have the impression that some things are not handled well, it is best to clarify these problems directly with the persons involved.

In some hospitals a mediator is available to get advice if necessary.

Do not forget a compliment if everything has worked out to your satisfaction!



“Doctor, can you please explain to me...”

Your right to complete information.

Depending on the age and development, your child has the right to be informed by the doctor about all necessary examinations and interventions in a way it can understand. It has the right to be listened to and that its opinion is taken into consideration.

For each treatment and examination it is necessary to obtain the agreement of the parents. Therefore, you have the right to full information and explanations that enable you to take a decision. In case of an older child, at about twelve years or earlier if it has already undergone several interventions, the agreement of the child also needs to be obtained.



“Bad atmosphere” in the children’s ward

Children sometimes show uncustomary reactions in connection with their illness and the hospital.

While in hospital some children tend to behave more aggressively and rejecting towards their parents, they are weepy or are defiant. This does not mean at all that parents should better stay at home. A child that shows its

feelings is afterwards often more balanced than a child that silently and passively endures everything.



Even after the end of a hospital stay children may remain quite demanding. They have to come to terms with what has happened and with the experience that things changed from one day to the other and neither father nor mother had been able to prevent it.

Some children have difficulties to sleep during the first few weeks after a hospital stay. Try to soothe your child when it awakens in the night and don’t be afraid of spoiling it thereby. As soon as the child has regained its confidence these problems mostly disappear. However, should these disturbances continue for a longer period of time it is advisable to take recourse to professional help.

“And who is helping me?”

Where parents can find help and assistance.

A stay in hospital is a far-reaching experience for the entire family and can bring parents to the edge of exhaustion. Then it is good to know that you can contact the Swiss Association Child & Hospital by telephone or in writing. We support you with a variety of information, books and toys. And also with specific recommendations on how to prepare for a stay in hospital as well as useful tips for the time in hospital. Thanks to our comprehensive experience of many years we can assist you in attending to and solving problems around a hospital stay of your child.

Please support the rights of the sick child!

Child & Hospital unites parents, nurses, paediatricians and other professionals working with children.

We are working towards the implementation of the 10 points of the European Charter for Children in Hospital adopted in 1988 and of the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child. We are committed to achieving this goal in cooperation with associations from 18 European countries, which are members of the European umbrella organisation EACH European Association for Children in Hospital.

Sick children do not have a powerful lobby. Please support their rights by joining Child & Hospital as a member.



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KIND & SPITAL

Postfach 416, CH-5600 Lenzburg 1
Tel. 062 888 01 77
E-Mail: info@kindundspital.ch
www.kindundspital.ch

Postkonto: 80 - 67141 - 4

Bank: Aarg. Kantonalbank, CH-5001 Aarau
Kto. 16 130.655.36
IBAN: CH03 0076 1016 0130 6553 6

“I am going to Hospital!”



A pocket guide for children, parents and care persons.



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Swiss Association for the Rights
of Children and Adolescents in Health Care