

Preparing you and your Child for Hospital – a Parent’s Guide

A visit to hospital can be confronting for both children and parents. Here are some ideas and information to help you and your child before, during and after a hospital visit.

What to tell your child about coming into hospital

Tell your child honestly and truthfully why they need to come to hospital. Telling your child before coming into hospital gives them time to prepare by asking questions and talking with you and others. Use simple words your child will understand.

- Depending on the age of the child, give them plenty of time for ‘hospital play’. You can get them to do things like bandaging a teddy, listening to family member’s heart beats, practicing taking medicine.
- Read books together about going to hospital. Your local library, school, kindergarten or child care may be able to assist you.
- Be prepared for your child to ask the same question several times. Each time you answer them they will be absorbing a little more information as well as getting reassurance from you.
- Plan with your child and involve them in choosing what you will bring into hospital:
 - A favourite doll, blanket, teddy or other comfort item;
 - A favourite activity or maybe a new one especially for the hospital.
- Tell your child’s school, kindergarten or childcare about the hospital admission. They will also be able to help prepare your child for their hospital admission.
- Reassure your child that you will be coming and staying with them. Usually, you will be able to stay with your child until they are asleep (have an anaesthetic) before their surgery. In most cases, you can also be with them in recovery after the operation.

Before coming into hospital

- Find out all the information you need about your child’s surgery and hospital stay from relevant people at your doctor’s offices, your health fund and the hospital including admission time and fasting time.
- If your child is staying overnight, contact your health fund and the hospital about boarding arrangements.
- Get together a list of things you will need to bring with you, and any questions you have about your child’s hospital stay.
- Arrange for the care of your other children, and organise any other arrangements for your home, with your family or friends.

What to bring with you to the hospital

- Any pyjamas and toiletries/personal items you may need for you and your child
- Layers of comfortable clothing
- Your child’s favourite toy or comfort item
- Activities and books for you and your child
- Medicare and health insurance information

During Hospitalisation

- Remember to take breaks to look after yourself. This will help you to be better able to provide support and care for your child.
- Do as much as you feel comfortable with in caring for your child. Feel free to talk to the friendly South Perth Hospital nursing staff about how much you want to be involved in your child's care.
- When your doctor comes to review your child, you can ask questions regarding their care and postoperative treatment plan. It may be helpful to write the questions down beforehand so you don't forget, as ward rounds can be a busy time.
- If you are at all unsure about what is happening with your child's care, feel free to ask questions. The South Perth Hospital nursing staff will do their best to include you in the handover process so that you are aware of your child's treatment plan. Staff appreciate that this is a stressful time for you and your child, and will try to work with you so you feel comfortable with what is happening in hospital.
- Parents can be with their child at all times on the ward. Ask the ward staff about visiting times and the direct phone number for other family members and visitors to call you on.

Getting ready to go home

- On the day of discharge, you will usually be expected to be ready for discharge by 10.00am. Try to arrange the day before for someone to collect you from the hospital if needed.
- Remember to ask for any medical certificates you may need for your child's school or childcare, or for your own workplace.
- Ensure you have, and understand, the instructions for your child's care at home (including instructions for pain relief) and any follow up appointments needed.
- Collect any medications or scripts you might need for your child when they go home.

When your child goes home

- It is not unusual for a child to show some behaviours that are different to normal when they leave hospital. For example, they may be clingy, attention seeking or display 'babyish' behaviours which they had previously grown out of. A visit to hospital is a big event in a child's life, even if it is only for a day procedure. Stick to your usual routines and give them some time, patience and understanding. Your child will soon return to their normal self.
- Siblings may also be clingy or show attention seeking behaviours. It has been different for them too, so allow time for their questions and also try to involve them in events.
- Again, allow your child plenty of time to 'play' being in hospital and asking questions. They have more information and experience now, and often need to explore these experiences to make sense of and cope with them.
- Never threaten your child with a return to hospital as a punishment for behaviours you do not like.

For more information

Contact the Clinical Nurse Manager Surgical Services on 9367 0222 if you have any further queries or access other fact sheets on the South Perth Hospital website www.sph.org.au