

Preparing Children for Visits to Massachusetts General Hospital

Some tips for before, during and after the visit

Before bringing the child to visit:

Make sure it is the child's choice to visit.

Allow the child the choice to come to the hospital to visit. Some children might rather send in a card or picture.

Bring a "neutral adult" to support the child.

This person needs to be able to leave with the child when the child is ready to leave. It should not be someone that wants to see the patient or the family at this visit.

Talk to the child before the visit.

Describe what he/she will see, hear and smell. Help the child anticipate the emotions of the adults. Are people sad, worried or upset? Also let the child know if there will be other visitors or if there is a roommate.

Take pictures of the patient and the patient's room.

Photos may help prepare the child for what he/she will see. Ask your social worker to take pictures if you think it will be helpful.

Plan to leave something behind.

If the child wants to, suggest making a picture or bringing in a photo of the child to leave with the patient.

During the child's visit:

The child can change his or her mind.

It is okay for the child to come to the hospital and then decide he/she does not want to go into the room. If possible, the patient (or another family member) should say, "I'm so glad you came."

Give the child permission to touch.

But do not force contact (hugs or kisses). Remember this can be scary for the child.

During the child's visit:

Shorter visits are okay.

Allow for the child to stay only as long as he or she wants to.

Show the child who is taking care of his or her family member.

If possible, introduce the child to the nurse or doctor taking care of the patient. Kids want to know who is taking care of their loved one.

Leave when the child is ready.

Have the "neutral adult" leave with the child when the child is ready. Perhaps they can go get a snack or an ice cream in the cafeteria.

After the child's visit

Offer the child the chance to talk about what he or she saw and felt. But, do not force the child to talk. If a child doesn't want to talk, let them know they can talk to you whenever they want.

Encourage the child to ask questions.

- Here are some questions to start the conversation:
- Was it what you expected?
- What surprised you the most?
- What are you curious about?
- What kind of worries do you have?

What to do at home?

Give the child chances to play, draw, write stories, or paint pictures about the visit. Here are some helpful toys to have available: dolls, medical kits, dollhouse with family, clay, blank paper, journal for writing, any that encourages talking about feelings.

Encourage the child to stay "in touch" with the patient.

Use phone calls, messages, sending in pictures or cards, or additional visits as needed.

Where can I get more information or help? Ask to speak to a clinical social worker. Call 617-726-2640.