

Hospital Parent Comfort Guide

You are not alone

A free guide for parents and caregivers when a child is in the hospital.



Dear Parents and Caregivers,

As parents who have had a child in the hospital, we remember the worry, the waiting, and wanting so much to make everything better. Every family's experience is different, but we know how much those long days can ask of you.

We created this guide to offer a little comfort and help you find your next step. Read only what feels useful today. You do not have to take it all in at once.

You do not have to be calm every moment or find the perfect words. You deserve kindness and support as you care for your child.

With love and understanding,
Susan & Denis Downing
Bradykin Children's Foundation

Five things to remember

- 1. Your observations matter.** Tell the team what is usual for your child and what feels different. [1]
- 2. Questions are welcome.** Ask for plain language and repeat explanations whenever you need them. [1]
- 3. Support is available.** Ask about child life, social work, and help for your family's practical needs. [1]
- 4. Small comforts can help.** A familiar story or favorite item may make the room feel less unfamiliar. Ask what is allowed. [1]
- 5. You need care too.** A drink of water, a meal, or a brief pause is a worthwhile next step. [3]

This guide offers general support and questions to discuss with your child's team. Follow their medical instructions and your hospital's policies.

During your child's stay

Keep a short list of questions. If you cannot be present for an update, ask the team how you can receive it.

Questions for the care team

- What do we know so far, and what are we still waiting to learn?
- What is today's plan? When should we expect the next update?
- What is this test or treatment for? What benefits, risks, and alternatives should we understand?
- How will you assess and treat my child's pain or discomfort?
- What changes should I tell you about right away, and how do I reach the nurse?
- Who is coordinating my child's care? Can I join the team's daily discussion, sometimes called rounds? [1]

Words you can use: "I am overwhelmed. Please explain that again in everyday language." Or, "Let me repeat what I heard so we can check that I understand."

Helping your child feel supported

Use honest, simple words. Ask the team or a child life specialist how to explain what your child will see and feel. If you do not know an answer, say you will ask. [2]

Make room for feelings. "It is okay to feel scared. We can ask for help together." Avoid promising that something will not hurt or that your child will be home by a certain time. [2]

Offer a small choice when it is allowed. "Would you like this story or that one?" Follow the care team's instructions about food, movement, and activities. [1, 2]

Ask for help before a procedure. Child life specialists can help with preparation and coping, including distraction. Ask whether you can stay close and what comfort measures are safe. [1]

Share what works for your child. Tell the team about communication needs, sensory sensitivities, favorite activities, and anything that tends to increase fear. [2]

A familiar voice, a quiet story, or simply sitting together can be a moment of comfort. Your child does not need to hide their feelings for you.

Taking care of your family

A little care for you

You may feel frightened, tired, frustrated, or numb. You do not have to put a positive face on every moment. Ask for someone to listen. A hospital social worker, counselor, spiritual care provider, or trusted person may help. [3]

- Choose one small need: a meal, water, clean clothes, or a few quiet minutes. Arrange a break with the nurse or another caregiver when possible. [3]
- If it feels comfortable, rest your feet on the floor and notice what you can see and hear. Let your breathing settle at its own pace. [3]
- Give helpers a specific task: "Could you bring dinner?" "Can you pick up the children?" "Would you update the family for us?" [1]

Ask your hospital about help with parking, meals, lodging, insurance questions, or school and work arrangements. Availability varies; the social work or family support team can help you find out what is offered.

Before you go home

Ask the team to review the discharge plan with you. Use this checklist to identify anything that still needs explaining. [4]

- **Written instructions:** I understand the home care plan and have a copy I can find easily.
- **Medicines:** I know what to give, the dose and timing, what changed, and how to obtain prescriptions.
- **Home care:** I have practiced any needed equipment or care steps with the team and know the food and activity limits.
- **When to get help:** I know the warning signs, what to do, and whom to call during the day and after hours.
- **Follow up:** I know the next appointment and who will discuss any results still pending.

Try saying: "Please watch me show you how I will do this at home." If supplies, transportation, costs, or caregiving support are a concern, tell the team before you leave. [4]

When your child comes home, allow time to settle back into routines. Discuss new or persistent worries or behavior changes with your child's clinician. [4]

Our notes and next steps

Use this page if it helps. You can also keep these notes in your phone. Keep personal medical information private.

Date and the person we spoke with

The most important question we want to ask today

What we learned and the next step

What helps our child feel comfortable

Who to contact with concerns during the day and after hours

Follow up appointment or next update

Trusted places to learn more

The practical suggestions in this guide draw on these resources. Tap a title in the PDF to open it. Hospital services differ; ask your own team what is available.

- [1] **American Academy of Pediatrics** · [What to expect when your child is admitted](#)
- [2] **UCLA Health** · [Preparing for your child’s hospital stay](#)
- [3] **Boston Children’s Hospital CAPE** · [Tools for caregivers](#)
- [4] **Children’s Health** · [Going home from the hospital](#)

Created by Bradykin Children’s Foundation • October 2026
General support only. Your child’s care team is your source for medical advice.

For today, one question and one small act of care may be enough. We are thinking of you and your family.