



## How to help...Your Child Visit the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit

The Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) environment can be overwhelming to children. Preparing your child for the visit can decrease anxiety and misconceptions. Often times the space is noisy, busy and unfamiliar but, we believe that inviting siblings is an important part of the sibling's emotional well-being. Visiting gives the sibling a chance to see that their brother or sister is being well cared for and it builds trust. However, we do recognize that every child is different and that families know and understand the needs of their children best. If you do decide it is important for your child to visit, talk with the bedside nurse to see if there are any issues that should be considered. Also, if you would like assistance or support in preparing your child for the visit, ask to speak with a Child Life Specialist.

Below are some suggestions to assist you

- Find out what your visiting child already knows and understands about their sibling in the hospital.
- When explaining what they will experience, use words that describe what they will see and hear (i.e. what medical equipment is being used, what the room looks like).
- Ask to have a picture taken of your hospitalized child to share with your visiting child to help answer questions and prepare them for what to expect.
- Encourage your visiting child to ask questions and express emotions.
- Offer honest information and answers and know that it is "OK" to not have ALL the answers.
- Give your visiting child permission to touch and talk to their brother/sister or not to, as well.
- Remind your visiting child that when entering the PICU, they will pass other patient rooms and that children are in the hospital for different reasons.
- Let your child know they can change their mind about visiting at any time.
- Watch closely for nonverbal cues/body language (for example, looking away from the patient, backing away from the patient, keeping arms crossed) that tell you your visiting child is uncomfortable or overwhelmed.
- Agree on a signal for your visiting child to do to let you know if they feel they are ready to leave the room.
- Have a "job" for your visiting child to help with the time spent in the room (i.e. give a stuffed animal to the patient, crayons and paper to work on a picture).
- Have a follow-up activity (i.e. drawing a picture or making a card to be hung in brother or sister's room) which can help provide closure to the visit, this will also give your visiting a chance to release some emotion without having to talk or even a positive reason to step out of the room if they are feeling overwhelmed.
- Spend some time talking quietly to find out how your visiting child felt about the visit.
- Know that you are always welcome to ask for help. Child Life, Nursing and Social Work are available and willing to help you and your children through this difficult time.