

#GettingThrough communication during an inpatient stay

Created by and for families

Good communication both with your child and the professionals is an important part of your child's inpatient stay. This leaflet has been created to provide practical tips to help you. Arrange a time with a member of staff to go through these questions:

Keeping in touch with your child:

What is the best way to keep in touch with my child? E.g. phone, Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom etc.	
Can they have a mobile phone? Is there a ward phone they can use?	
Can they call me, or do I need to call them?	
Are there specific times to contact them? And are there any specific times to avoid, such as meal times?	
Will they be able to access the internet?	
Can any friends and family contact them? Or is there a list of people allowed to call?	
Anything else I should know about keeping in touch with my child?	

Tips for keeping in touch with your child.

In the run up to admission, communication may have been difficult. Now, your child may not want to talk to you at all or they may be looking for lots of reassurance. Either (or both!) can be tough for a parent to cope with. No matter what they say or do your communication really matters. Things can and do get better. Until you get there, here are a few tips from other parents who have been through similar experiences:

- Remember that this is not a 'normal' situation. Accept that things may feel different or unnatural and just go with it.
- Before a visit or a call think about what you might say: chatting about the dog, friends and family, what you watched on TV can help keep them connected to everyday life.
- Sometimes sitting in silence is ok; just letting your child know you are there can be enough. Try not to take it personally if they don't want to talk or see you (easier said than done).
- Send a text or card - they will appreciate it, even if they don't say so!
- It can be easier to talk while doing – playing cards or computer games.
- You know your child better than anyone; follow your instinct and do what feels right for you and your child.

Keeping in touch with the unit:

What is the best way to communicate with the unit? E.g. phone or email?	
Who is our named contact? Who do we speak to if they are not there?	
If my child is upset or has told me something I'm worried about should I contact the unit? What will you do with this information?	
Is there a regular day for updates? How will I be told about meetings, home visits or incidents?	
Anything else I should know about communicating with the unit?	
Can any friends and family contact them? Or is there a list of people allowed to call?	

Tips for keeping in touch with the unit

Remember you and the staff are all part of the same team. The experience of talking to so many professionals can be overwhelming, so here are a few tips which may help:

- It will take time to establish relationships, build trust and work out who is who. Shift patterns generally mean you won't see the same staff every visit.
- Don't be afraid to ask – you are likely to be in unfamiliar circumstances. Even if your child has had a previous admission, each unit is different. There is no such thing as a silly question.
- Talking to professionals can feel daunting. If you are nervous (which is totally understandable) write down the questions you have, take a deep breath, and say 'I can do this' before you pick up the phone.
- The language and terms used may be unfamiliar to you. Understanding what they mean can help you to be part of the team caring for your child. Ask staff to explain abbreviations and unfamiliar terms.
- This is a very emotional time which may affect how much information you can take in -you will be receiving a lot- so it can be useful to carry a notebook around.
- Having a child with mental health difficulties is often challenging and rarely straightforward. You have got this far. Go easy on yourself – you can get through this.
- You know your child better than anyone; follow your instinct and do what feels right for you and your child.