
The Child Psychiatry Unit

Developed by the health care professionals of the Child Psychiatry Unit with assistance from the Department of Learning and Development.

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An agency of the Provincial
Health Services Authority

4500 Oak Street, Vancouver BC, V6H 3N1

604-875-22077

1-888-300-3088

website: www.bcchildrens.ca

Use this space to write down concerns you wish to discuss

The Child Psychiatry Unit

Dear Parent/Guardian

Your Child _____

has been referred for admission to the Psychiatry Unit of the hospital. We have put your child's name on the waiting list. This booklet tells you about the unit and the program. We hope it will make you feel comfortable about the hospital. We will let you know, in advance, the day and time when your child can be admitted. There is normally a wait of several months. The average stay is three to four weeks but this depends on what the needs of your child may be.

Pre-Admission Program (Lower Mainland referrals only)

The pre-admission program means that you and your child will come to BC Children's Hospital for 3 to 4 visits as an outpatient while you are on the wait list for the inpatient unit.

During the pre-admission visits, you and your child will meet with some of the following people on your child's health care team:

- your child's psychiatrist,
- nurse
- youth and family counselor
- other staff that may be involved with your care.

The pre-admission visits are opportunities for you and your child to:

- become familiar with our staff and our program.
- help you with behavioural management of your child.
- decide on the goals for the upcoming inpatient admission.
- start any testing (Psychological, Education, Occupational and/or Speech and Language) which may be necessary.

By participating in the pre-admission program, we hope that your child's stay in the inpatient unit will be shorter and that you will know what to expect. Sometimes, after your pre-admission visits, we may find that your child does not need an inpatient admission. In this case, we could follow-up with further visits to the hospital for testing and/or assessments on an outpatient basis.

Post-Discharge Program

After your child has completed his/her inpatient admission, your child will be followed for three months by our team. We will make contact, as needed, with health professionals identified in your child's discharge treatment plan. We will work with these health professionals to support follow through with our recommendations.

Before your child arrives we want to learn as much about him/her as we can. Please help us.

1. Take the time to fill out the Pre-admission Form as thoughtfully as you can. Your information is very valuable. It helps the hospital staff understand the problem from your point of view. You know your child better than anyone.

Return the Admission Form to:

The Intake Social Worker, Room P1-214
Child Psychiatry Unit, Mental Health Building
4500 Oak Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6H 3N1

2. Ask your child's teacher to complete the forms in this package and send them directly to the Intake Social Worker (address as above). Please give written permission to the teacher to provide us with the results of any testing that has been done through the school.
3. If you have any concerns, make a note of them on the page beside this one. You can call and discuss them with the social worker (Tel. 604-875-2110, or talk about them on the day of admission).
4. Please keep this pamphlet. The waiting list is long. You will want to refer to the pamphlet again after the admission call from the social worker
5. You are welcome to visit the unit before your child is admitted. Please arrange this with the social worker on the unit, 604-875-2110.

What You Can Expect From an Admission to Child Psychiatry

Through discussion, observations and testing, your child's behaviour, emotional responses, abilities and skills will be checked. This is done by a team of health professionals. The team includes psychiatrists and psychiatric residents, nurses, youth care workers, psychologists, social workers, special education teachers, occupational therapists, and speech/language pathologist. They will try to understand the specific problems your child is having and the way the family reacts and responds to your child.

Medical Check

A doctor will do a complete physical examination of your child. A sample of blood and urine may be taken for testing. Your child may have some tests such as an EEG (electroencephalogram) – a special test which gives a record of the electrical activity in the brain. The doctor may ask specialists such as a neurologist or an allergist to examine your child. Specialists may check your child's sight, hearing, and language development.

Tell the supervising psychiatrist about all the health problems your child has had.

Treatment Plan

The team will work with you to develop a treatment plan*. The plan will help you use the strengths in your family to better manage behaviour and emotional issues. Your family will benefit from carrying out the plan while your child is on the ward or at home during weekends. The team will all follow the same strategies for managing your child's behaviour. Working together makes for consistency and is most helpful for your child.

Whenever you have questions or concerns about any part of the treatment, please speak to one of the team members. You are an important member of your child's team. You need to understand and feel comfortable with the treatment plans.

*Please let us know what you most want to work to change during this hospital stay.

About Medication: Except in an emergency, your child will not be given medication unless the team, including you, feels that it could make a big difference to your child.

Individual Counseling

Every child is given one-to-one counseling. Also, children work in regular groups to learn acceptable social skills. They are expected to practice these during daily activities such as swimming, skating, and outdoor games.

Keeping Parents Informed

The staff will meet with you regularly to discuss test results and your child's response to the program. We will meet before discharge to go over our findings and recommendations with you. Together with you, we will plan follow-up in your community. After discharge, we will send you a summary report.

Discharge Conference

With your permission, the professionals in your community who were involved with your family before the admission, and those who will be involved, are invited to a discharge planning conference. At this conference, we share our findings and recommendations. We make plans for the future. It is helpful if everyone who is important in your child's life is working toward the same goals in a consistent way. We will ask you to sign permission for your family doctor and others involved from your community to receive reports and a summary of the findings and recommendations.

What to Tell Your Child About the Unit

We suggest that you do not tell your child that s/he is going to the hospital until you receive a call giving you a specific admission date. There is not much point in making the child anxious about something so far in the future.

These ideas of what to say to your child are a guide. Follow your own feelings about what is best to say and use your own words. Talk with your child in an honest, matter-of-fact way. **What** you say is sometimes less important than **how**

you say it. Your manner should show your child that you are comfortable with the hospital and that all the family needs is some help from the hospital.

What you say might go something like this:

“I had a telephone call today from someone at Children’s Hospital. They have a place for you in a program that can help us with the difficulties you’re having with..... The people at the hospital may be able to show you and me and _____ how to do things differently to make things better for all of us. They have sent us a book about the hospital. We will read it together to find out more”.

The Part the Family Plays While the Child is on the Unit

The family is the constant in the child’s life. If things are going to change for the child, the family must be part of the change. Both parents must be involved unless one parent has no contact.

1. Be available

We will need to share information and make decisions together. On the day of admission, before discharge, and at least once a week, the psychiatrist and other team members will meet with both parents/guardians to counsel and support you. These meetings take place during normal working hours. Please arrange time off work and other responsibilities to attend. We can work with your child only if you are available to work with us.

2. Participate

We encourage you, and your other children, to join in the activity program as much as possible. This does not mean you must visit every day but often is best. The more involved you are, the more successful the outcome is likely to be.

Don’t give up being a parent while your child is on the unit. Love and comfort your child as always. Discipline him/her if necessary even when staff are present. We will give you written guidelines for what behaviour is expected on the unit. The staff will suggest ways of managing the child’s behaviour that they feel will be effective. Parents are partners in the treatment program.

3. Communicate

It is important that you feel free to raise any issues and ask any questions of the staff. The staff on the unit are not too busy to talk to you. If you are troubled by any part of the program...don’t “stew” about it...talk to the staff. If you notice changes in your child or family, please share these with the staff. If you begin to worry about something once you get home, don’t hesitate to phone the unit. When children tell you about their experiences in the program, the picture they give may be different from what the staff report. It is important that parents and staff talk openly, honestly, and often.

4. Attend family the education program

When one member of a family is having difficulties, all members of the family are affected. The family education program supports your efforts to rebuild family relationships. The way the family responds can encourage or discourage the child.

The unit offers a regular weekly Family Education Program. A brochure about the program is enclosed. This program is an important part of the child’s admission. **We expect that parents or guardians with a child in the unit to attend all sessions.** If, for some reason, you cannot attend, please discuss with our unit social worker.

Out of town families

Participating fully can be hard for some families who live outside Vancouver. But the problems concern the whole family, not just the child. Please speak to the social worker so together you can work out when and how to support your child to get the most benefit for the whole family.

The social worker can also help with practical things like arranging reasonable accommodation in the area and obtaining funds for families on social assistance. You can contact our social worker by calling 604-875-2110.

Accommodation on the Unit

The Psychiatric Unit is a separate area on the first floor of the Mental Health Building. It has beds for 10 children. We expect them to make their own beds and keep their room tidy.

Children and staff eat meals together around a table. Please do not bring meals from home. If you bring snacks or special treats, the staff will keep them for your child. We only allow snacks at snack time. Children are not allowed to keep food in their rooms.

There is a play/living area with TV/VCR on the unit. There are also many games, books and toys.

School on the Unit

Children go to school for approximately 3 hours each day in the schoolroom on the unit. A special education teacher and alternate program worker help each child continue with school work. It helps the teacher to have the child's textbooks, notebooks, and last report card. Please pick these up from your child's school and bring them with you to the hospital on the day of admission.

Visiting on the Unit

We do not regard family as "visitors" spending time with your child. Parents, brothers and sisters are welcome at any time. Please be responsible for your children at all times. Friends and schoolmates may visit as well. We have no set visiting hours but evenings are usually best. During the school year it is best not to interrupt the school time or group activities that are a part of each day. However, parents and siblings are very welcome to join in any of the planned activities like swimming, bowling, or skating.

We suggest that visitors always call ahead so that they don't arrive to find the child out or involved in an activity. If, as often happens, everyone (staff and children) has left the unit, the Unit Clerk can usually tell you when we expect to be back.

Phone calls: Children can phone their family with a staff's permission. Please tell us if there is someone else whom it is important for your child to be able to call.

Weekend Programs

Weekends at home: Usually, your child will go home for the weekends. Parents from out of town can visit with their child in Vancouver, or arrange for their child to spend weekends with a responsible relative. If this is not possible, you can discuss with the Social Worker to make arrangements for the child to stay on the unit.

Weekend procedure:

Friday: Family meet with a staff member to discuss managing behaviour and continuing treatment during the weekend. You then take your child home.

At home: Follow your normal weekend routine. Your child is a member of the family, not a guest in the home, treat him/her as such. Don't reorganize your time or routines to entertain your child, but do keep up the agreed upon treatment. Don't expect everything to go smoothly. Learning new ways of dealing with your child's behaviour takes time. Remember, the staff have years of training and experience in dealing with a variety of behaviour problems. It is hard for parents to feel confident with a new approach to their child in a short time. Don't be hard on yourself. If you need support or advice – call.

A staff member may arrange a time to visit your home during a weekend. This is an opportunity for you to discuss some of the interactions that happen around your child.

Sunday evening: When you bring your child back to the hospital, one of the staff will review the weekend with you for about 30 minutes. Return times to the unit are generally mid to later afternoon on Sunday.

What to bring to the Unit

Clothing: Children wear their own clothes and pajamas. Please bring enough clothes for a week if possible. Clothing should be comfortable and easy care. It is important to label the clothing with your child's name. We suggest the following:

- 3 pairs pyjamas, and slippers
- 4 pairs pants, 4 t-shirts/sweat shirts, etc.
- 6 pairs socks, 6 underwear
- Swimsuit
- A sweater/sweat shirt or two
- A warm coat and boots, hat and gloves in winter

Toiletries: brush and comb, toothbrush and paste, shampoo

Personal items: Your child can bring a favourite quilt, pillow, or cuddly toy. Expensive toys or radios are not a good idea. The hospital cannot be responsible for broken, lost or stolen items.

Laundry: Please take your child's clothes home to launder every 3-4 days. The staff will do the laundry for children from out of town when parents are unable to. Parents who are staying may use the laundry facilities to wash their child's clothes.

Activity Program Allowance: We ask parents to give \$20.00 toward the activity program. Please tell us if this will strain your family budget. The money is a request, not an expectation.

Please do not give money to your child. Children have no need for it in the hospital and we do not allow them to spend it. Tell other visitors about this.

Medication: If your child takes medication, bring the bottle on the day of admission. The psychiatrist will note the name and dose. Please take it home after this. It is not safe to leave medication in the child's room. You and your psychiatrist will agree on the medication plan. Medications allowed are those prescribed by the hospital psychiatrist and given by a registered nurse. A nurse will give only the agreed upon drug to your child.

School work: Do not forget to collect your child's textbooks and school work from the school and bring these with you.

Common Concerns for Parents

We try to create a family feeling and provide a normal daily life rather than a hospital routine for the children. The staff are firm, kind, and fair. Some parents are embarrassed when their child responds well. They feel that staff will blame them for the child's problems. Please understand that:

- the staff are here to support, not blame;
- the staff realize that managing children for a short time, when one is supported by a team of trained professionals, is different from parenting a child for 24 hours a day;
- the behaviour problems you describe may not show themselves during the initial "honeymoon" phase of the admission, but we know they will surface in time.

Many parents worry that their child will copy undesirable behaviours from the other children. This does not seem to happen.

Some parents fear that their child, or another child, may lose control and cause hurt. Keeping the children safe – emotionally and physically – is the most important part of our job. We have a room where we can isolate a child for a time out. Also, in dangerous situations, we will hold an out-of-control child or give medication to calm the child.

Parents are sometimes hurt if their child ignores them when they visit. Ignoring is common. It usually means that the child is excited by the new activities and people, and angry with you for arranging the hospitalization.

If you have other worries or would like to talk more about these, please call the unit.

You will be called when a bed becomes available. The intake officer for the unit is the social worker.

How can I be involved in the treatment of my child?

Because Inpatient Child Psychiatry is committed to a family centred approach, it is important that parents be as involved as possible in treatment.

What if I live too far away?

Your child will stay with you on weekends during the stay at BC Children's Hospital. If you do not have relatives or friends to stay with, there are options near the hospital:

Easter Seal House

Phone: 604-736-3475

Reservations Only: 1-800-818-3666

Heather House

Phone: 604-875-2298

Toll free: 1-888-300-3088 Local 2298

What if I can't afford it?

Talk to the social worker in the Inpatient Child Psychiatry Unit who is organizing your admission. He/she can help you find alternative sources of funding. The social worker needs to know this before your child is admitted.

If you receive social assistance benefits, talk to your financial assistance worker to prepare for your child's admission and the extra expenses that this will incur.