Child Life Department

Helping children cope with a hospital stay

Play is the core of the Child Life Program. It helps children relieve tension, express concerns and fears, and experience a sense of control over their environment.

Our Playrooms and Teen Zone provide a place to have fun, safe, supportive play and social interaction. Your child will enjoy activities and entertainment as well as a wide variety of books, toys and crafts.

Child Life specialists are members of the healthcare team who work directly with your child and family to help reduce anxiety and adjust to the hospital experience.

This handout has more information about Child Life specialists, the Playrooms and Teen Zone, and the Therapeutic Play programs we offer.

Child Life specialists

As professional members of Children’s healthcare team, Certified Child Life Specialists focus on the emotional and developmental needs of hospitalized infants, children, teens and young adults.

What can Child Life specialists do for my child and family?

• Explain a diagnosis or treatment in words your child or teen can understand
• Create a coping plan for your child to use during a medical test or procedure
• Offer support before, during and after medical procedures
• Use therapeutic play and medical play to help your child understand medical procedures, provide ways to express feelings and help maintain a sense of control
• Work with medical staff to assess your child’s unique needs
• Offer bereavement support to help families and siblings cope with death or loss
• Provide you with information on child development and the effects of healthcare

When should I ask for a Child Life specialist?

When your child or teen:

• Has a medical procedure that is challenging for them
• Shows significant changes in behavior or play
• Experiences long or repeated hospital stays
• Needs help to understand what is going on
• Has a difficult time coping with his or her hospitalization
• Faces a life-altering or life-threatening illness

Ask your nurse if your child might benefit from the services of a Child Life specialist.
Benefits of play
Appropriate play aimed at your child’s needs can make it easier for your child
to be in the hospital. Play helps with development and makes being in the
hospital less disruptive to your child’s life. It is especially important during
long hospital stays or when a child has to be isolated for medical reasons.

Types of play used by Child Life specialists
Medical play: Using medical equipment with dolls or teddy bears, patients can
act out medical procedures and learn what to expect during their hospital visit.

Distraction or diversion: Helping patients focus their attention on a fun activity
during an exam or procedure can relieve pain and reduce anxiety and stress.

Developmental play: Encouraging play for children of all ages promotes
normal development, socialization and fun!

Therapeutic play
Creative and innovative therapeutic play programs focus on meeting social
and emotional needs of hospitalized children and their families. These
activities help reduce anxiety and stress, encourage expression, complement
traditional pain management, and help with physical rehabilitation.

Art therapy
Our board-certified art therapists work with children to use many different
kinds of art for self-expression, art play and positive interaction.

Music therapy
Our board-certified music therapists use a wide variety of music modalities
(performance, song writing, spontaneous expression) with children of all ages.

Animal-assisted activities
“Pet Partners” are specially trained therapy teams. A dog and handler visit
children at the bedside to give them a warm, positive, normal interaction. Our
Pet Partners staff and volunteers can also motivate patients and help support
rehabilitation goals.

Sibshops
When a child becomes ill, the entire family is affected. Sibshops provide
support and guidance to siblings of children with special medical or
developmental needs.

Siblings are encouraged to share the challenges and celebrate the joys with
brothers and sisters in similar situations during lively, action-packed, 3-hour
workshops. Sibshops reflect the belief that siblings have much to offer one
another if given a chance.

For more information or to register, call 206-987-4133.
Clinic Sibling Playroom

The Clinic Sibling Playroom (level 6, Ocean zone) is for patients and their brothers and sisters when patients are here for clinic appointments. Children ages 3 to 11 are invited to stay for a 2-hour period while caregivers accompany patients to appointments. Children under age 3 and those over 3 who are not toilet trained are welcome to use the playroom when accompanied by a caregiver. We cannot provide one-on-one care.

See Clinic Sibling Playroom hours at left.

Inpatient Playroom and Teen Zone

These are both located on level 4, Mountain zone.

Inpatient Playroom

This is a place for kids of all ages to have fun, play games, and enjoy activities and entertainment. You may request a volunteer to play with your child. The Playroom also offers books, toys, crafts and videos that you can check out and take to your child’s room. Call ext. 7-4433. See Inpatient Playroom hours and volunteer hours at left.

The Playroom offers weekly activities for patients, including:

• Rock polishing, Tuesdays 2 to 4 p.m.
• Origami, Wednesdays 2 to 4 p.m.
• Weaving, Thursdays 2 to 4 p.m.

Visit the playroom or call for a weekly schedule of more activities.

Inpatient Teen Zone

This is a special place for patients and siblings ages 12 through 21. Parents and visitors may accompany a teen patient or sibling.

The Teen Zone has computers, Internet access, X-box and videos. It is open every day. See hours at left.

For a list of activities and events, visit the Teen Zone or call ext. 7-4433.