



Explaining hospice visiting restrictions to children under 12

Version 1.0

Updated 9/4/2020

We welcome your comments on this leaflet and the services we provide. You'll find comment boxes at reception, on the wards, in the Iona Café and in Day Therapies.

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Children under 12 - Visits to the hospice during the COVID-19 outbreak

At St Columba's Hospice, the health and wellbeing of our community is always our number one priority and as a result of Covid-19 the hospice have implemented some safeguards. Please see our website for a full list of these.

To keep the Hospice as safe as possible, we are unable to accept any visits from children under 12 years old until further notice. This is following guidance from NHS Lothian.

We understand that families are already facing enormously challenging times and that it may feel very difficult to talk to children about why they are not allowed to visit at the moment. We hope that this information will help.

Speaking to children about COVID-19 and how it is spread can help them to understand why they are not able to visit, and this information can help them better manage their feelings and worries. You might already have had a conversation with your child about COVID-19, because they have been off school or unable to visit friends and family. However, if you are looking for some more guidance on how to explain the virus to children, the information in this link might be useful: www.anxietyuk.org.uk/blog/how-to-talk-to-children-about-covid-19

Separation can be difficult for children and being away from their teachers, friends, wider family members and out of their normal routines may make what is happening feel even harder for them. Your child may be upset/angry that they aren't allowed to visit the person. It's ok to let them know that it makes you sad too, that it's ok for them to feel that way and that you're sorry the whole family can't visit together. Try to reassure them that the doctors/nurses are taking the very best care of their loved one and that they are not alone. If your child asks when they will be able to visit it is helpful to be honest and to say that you don't know but that you will let them know as soon as anything changes.

Explain the situation to children in simple terms that they can understand. For example: "Everyone has been asked to stay at home as much as possible to try to stop the virus from spreading. We know that children who get this virus are normally fine but this virus is more dangerous for older people and people who are already poorly. As is poorly, we have to be extra careful about the virus spreading and try to stop them from getting sicker. You might not feel too bad if you catch the

virus but you could still pass it on to others. That is why school is closed and why you aren't allowed to visit"

While children can't come into the hospice, you can still consider some other ways they could keep in contact with the person, such as using Skype or Facetime. If the patient is well enough and willing to receive a videocall, then you can set this up using the person's smartphone or tablet. You may need to speak to a member of staff to be able to help with this. If the person is very poorly and you do not wish your child to see them like this, you could perhaps consider a phone call instead. Or maybe you could encourage your child to tell you what they would want to say to the person and you could put it in a text, or they could make a card or write a letter or draw a picture which you could then take a photograph of and email to the person. If they are drawing a picture/writing a letter you can ask them how they want to sign their message, for example: love you, miss you. They might even record themselves reading a story or record a message that can be sent to the person so they can listen to it. If you are using Facetime or some other video call, remember to prepare the child for what the person may look like, particularly if there have been any changes since the last time the child saw them or if they haven't been in the hospice before. Prepare them for what they might see in the room (e.g. if there is any medical equipment such as oxygen tubes you can explain that it is there to help them breathe). Our information leaflet "Explaining Incurable Illness to children" has more information to help you prepare children for changes due to illness.

If children are talking on the phone or Face time, encourage them to say goodbye at the end of the conversation. This ensures

they will always have had the opportunity to do this, just in case they don't have the opportunity to do this again. You don't have to be obvious about this, simply just remind them at the end of the call to "say goodbye now" as they usually would if they were on the telephone.

Normally we would try to help children understand when someone is close to death and give them choice about how to say goodbye. While this can be a very difficult conversation to have, we know that children can benefit if they are properly supported and given age-appropriate information in advance of the death. In these challenging and unprecedented times it may be even more important than usual to find some way to help children understand and prepare for the death and to give them choices over how to say goodbye, to help them with their grief.

Our Child and Family Worker can help you think through how best to support children at this difficult time. If you would like further information or support for yourself or your family, please contact **0131 551 7751** and the Access Team will direct you to the most appropriate services for your needs just now. You can also email us at access@stcolumbushospice.org.uk

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St Columba's Hospice Care
Updated 9/4/2020