

# The Play Service

Information for parents and carers



## The importance of play

Children love to play; it is an important part of their development. Through play, children learn how to build relationships, make friends and share with each other. Play can be imaginative, creative and give opportunities for children to express their emotions. It can also be therapeutic by helping children to adjust to hospitalisation. Health Play Specialists and Play Assistants are employed to meet the developmental needs of infants, children and young people while they are in hospital.

## The Play Service

Play provision and activities are a part of the total care of the children and young people attending the Royal Hospital for Children and Young People, Edinburgh as Inpatients and Outpatients.

Play services are organized by registered Health Play Specialists who hold a diploma or degree in Healthcare Play Specialism. Play assistants are also employed; all assistants have a childcare qualification and are experienced in child care/play work.

Health Play Specialists and Assistants cover all the wards plus Critical Care, Outpatients, Accident and Emergency, Planned Investigation Unit (Dirleton ward) and the Department of Surgical Admissions (Crichton ward). They provide a wide range of activities and toys as well as preparation/distraction for procedures carried out on the ward, including preparation of a child/young person who is going to theatre. The Health Play Specialist can also arrange a pre-admission visit.

## Volunteers

Volunteers assist the Play Specialists and undergo a careful selection procedure by the Volunteer Co-ordinator.

## Why is play in hospital important?

Play helps children to express their feelings. For children in hospital, play becomes even more important, as it can help them understand their illness and treatment; bring a feeling of normality; and helps them to relax in strange surroundings.

Children can be given opportunities to handle medical equipment and can role play with preparation dolls under the guidance and supervision of the Health Play Specialist.

Play can help relieve feelings of anger, fear and frustration. It builds up a child's confidence and can prevent them becoming distressed or withdrawn.

## What do Play Specialists do?

Play Specialists encourage and provide suitable play activities and programmes for children of all ages. They also:

- Work alongside other members of the multidisciplinary team
- Provide one to one therapeutic play sessions around procedural anxiety
- Use play as a tool to implement coping techniques and relaxation
- Help children adapt to the new situation
- Reduce stress and anxiety in children by providing an outlet for feelings of anger or frustration
- Use play to prepare children for surgery and procedures
- Use play as a distraction for painful/unpleasant procedures
- Help families become involved in their child's care and play
- Make hospital a child-friendly environment
- Raise awareness of the importance of play with students and trained staff
- Arrange pre-admission visits for children and young people
- Provide special, educational sibling days
- Encourage continuation of education while in hospital
- Provide post-procedural play.

## Coping with feelings

Messy play, using water, sand, paint, clay and jelly, is an ideal way in which children can express themselves and is very popular. Active play can help reduce excess energy. Imaginative play can become a channel for expressing feelings. The Play Specialist understands the needs and will help the child in the best way possible.

Many of the games and pastimes are the same as those enjoyed at school or playgroup. Family play is encouraged on the ward so that everyone can feel involved.

## How parents or carers can help

Try to prepare your child for what will happen to them before coming into hospital. Talk as honestly as you can to your child and encourage him or her to discuss fears and worries with you. You could play doctors and nurses, or read stories about hospitals – your local library will have some useful books available. You may also speak to nursery and school teachers for advice.

You can also access: [children.nhs.uk/department-services/?sft\\_category=play](https://www.children.nhs.uk/department-services/?sft_category=play) for further information about the Play Service. There are also some preparation videos on the [children.nhs.uk](https://www.children.nhs.uk) website.

Whilst on the ward encourage your child to participate in the normal activities provided by the Play Specialist/Play Assistant in the playroom.

Children and young people need lots of encouragement and praise whilst in hospital. Listen to your child when you go home – they may need to talk about what has happened in hospital.

## Post-hospitalisation

Post-hospitalisation, when a child or young person is discharged from hospital, their behaviour may be slightly different than before admission. Your child may cling to familiar adults, have temper tantrums or regress. This behaviour should fade over time, but at home the child will need time to adjust to their own routine.

## Further information

For further information please contact the Hospital Play Services Coordinator on **0131 312 0364**.

