

# Helping children and youth

## The role of a Child Life Specialist in the Neonatal Nurseries

---

Your baby needs special care in one of the Neonatal Nurseries. This can be a very stressful time for you and your family. This information sheet describes how the Child Life Specialist can help children, youth and their parents.

### Helping children and youth

Having a sibling in one of the Neonatal Nurseries may be a difficult time for your children because:

- they may not understand why the new baby is not at home
- their baby may look very small and sick, surrounded by unknown medical equipment
- they can imagine much worse things than the truth
- their daily routines have changed
- they may miss being with you, as you need to spend time in the Neonatal Nursery with the baby
- the hospital and Neonatal Nursery are unfamiliar places
- they may be hearing information that they do not understand or misinterpret
- they may feel they have done something to cause the baby's medical condition

Your children may have many emotions and fears. Each child will react to their feelings in different ways. A Child Life Specialist is available to meet with your children and help them understand and cope with these new circumstances.

A Child Life Specialist can help your children by:

- explaining health care and equipment in a way they can understand
- helping young children learn through play
- helping them express their feelings
- giving them comfort and emotional support
- helping them feel connected to their new sibling and their parents

Play is a child's way of learning. By playing with dolls, puppets or medical equipment your children can learn to understand what is happening, express their concerns and learn ways of coping. This is called therapeutic play.

A Child Life Specialist plans therapeutic play for each child, depending on their age, personality and emotional needs. Through play, your children can gain a sense of control. As your children's imagination unfolds, the hospital experience becomes less frightening.

## Helping parents

As a parent with a baby in one of the Neonatal Nurseries, you may be feeling:

- concerned about the needs of your children and family
- a need to learn about your baby's condition and care

A Child Life Specialist is aware of the many changes you may be experiencing and how difficult this can be.

The Child Life Specialist can assist you by:

- suggesting ways to continue supporting your children during this difficult time
- helping you recognize your family's strengths
- suggesting ways to explain information to your children about your baby's care and condition
- offering your family advice on ways to manage the changes you are experiencing

**If you would like to meet with a Child Life Specialist,  
call ext. 76129 or ask your Nurse or Social Worker  
to contact the Child Life Office.**