Virtual Support
for families experiencing grief and bereavement

children’s health
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Hospital Considerations at end of life

1. Gather information from a multitude of sources and collaborate with all disciplines to allow for a holistic approach (social work, chaplain, nurses, respiratory therapist, medical team). Be intentional in your questions and willing to step outside of your comfort zone.

2. Offer caregivers a plan and tangible ideas for memory-making, sibling death disclosure, and family involvement. It is essential to offer realistic and therapeutic choices.

3. Provide tangible resources and items family can use when disclosing death to siblings. It is also important to give siblings a role or job during this time. Family members or siblings at home can gather the patient’s favorite comfort item, book, blanket, or PJ set and provide to caregivers at the hospital.

4. Virtual support during memory-making and end of life opportunities are feasible and beneficial. Phone or video calls with siblings and extended family about the patient’s favorite colors and nicknames or sharing their favorite stories about the patient can play a significant role in creating a sense of community for those impacted by the death. Having family members present via video call allows primary caregivers to feel supported and family members to feel involved.

5. Some families can drive to the hospital or a nearby location to sit in their car and let their loved ones know they are near. Families may use this time to play music for the loved one, pray, wave, write letter to loved one, or sit in solidarity.

6. Extended family members can draw cards or pictures and send them to a support staff member to print and hang in the room.

7. Families may find comfort in everyday, normal activities – such as putting the patient in non-hospital PJ’s, doing the patient’s hair and nails, and putting non-hospital blankets on their bed.

8. When child life is not available, make resources and supplies easily available to the psychosocial and healthcare team via a “memory making box.” This box can include commonly used resources, medical examiners policy, print templates, and supplies to complete prints. Similar boxes can be made for families to take home and continue memory-making activities.

9. Some siblings or family members may request or benefit from seeing a photo of the patient at end of life. When appropriate, give children the choice as to whether they would like to see a final picture of their loved one or not. Prepare them for what they will see in the photo (i.e. sister will have her eyes closed and a tube in her mouth. Sister cannot talk and her body has stopped working.).

10. Establish follow-up care and check-ins with families – whether formal or informal in nature. Now more than ever, it is important that families know that they are supported, even after the death of a loved one.

11. This time can be emotionally-taxing on healthcare professionals so be sure to take care of yourself and all those that supported the family.
SIBLING SUPPORT

IDEAS AND WAYS TO HELP SIBLINGS FEEL CONNECTED DURING A HOSPITAL STAY

QUESTIONS? HAVE STAFF PAGE YOUR CHILD LIFE SPECIALIST

PHONE CALLS AND VIDEO CHAT

- Daily check-ins with sibling to talk about how they are doing and/or what they did that day.
- When appropriate, video chat with patient and family at hospital.
- If the patient is not able to talk or interact, have the sibling tell them about their favorite place, sing a song, or have them read a book to the patient.

TOOLS TO VIDEOCHAT

- Facetime (on apple devices)
- Skype (free for US calls)
- Houseparty (free)
- Marco Polo (free)

HELPFUL TIP: CALM, SOFT VOICES ARE BEST FOR PATIENTS

SENDING VIRTUAL LOVE

1. Sibling draws a card or picture for patient
2. Family member with sibling takes a picture of their creation
3. Picture emailed to you child life specialist to print out
4. Picture provided to nurse and Family at hospital hang on white board in room

Activity Ideas:

- Have sibling choose their favorite picture of themselves or with patient to be hung on the white board in patient’s room
- Have siblings record videos of themselves that can be played for patient via text or marco polo app
- Use apps to play electronic games virtually with one another:
  - words with friends
  - heads up
  - quiplash
- Use video chat to have a movie night together - both the sibling and patient/parent watch the same movie
- Make a sibling mailbox and siblings can send mail letters and mad-libs back and forth through caregivers visiting the hospital and home

MUSIC

- Have sibling make a spotify, itunes, or youtube playlist of calming, favorite songs
- Have sibling write down a list of favorite songs for family at bedside to play on youtube
THE INVISIBLE STRING

AN ACTIVITY TO HELP CONNECT FAMILIES

"People who love each other are always connected by a very special String, made of love. Even though you can’t see it with your eyes, you can feel it deep in your heart, and know that you are always connected to the ones you love."

The invisible string is a book that helps to remind people, both old and young, that even though you may be away from your loved ones, you are always connected by LOVE and are always in each other’s HEARTS.

HOW TO MAKE YOUR INVISIBLE STRING

Supplies:
Papers: String Markers

1. On the paper hearts, write the name of a family member or friend you want to connect with in LOVE.

2. Use the string to connect each heart together. It should make a chain of hearts connected by the string. See example to the left.

3. Now find a place in your home to hang your creation! Always remember that even if you are not with the people you love, you are always connected by the LOVE you have for one another.
Bereavement templates
EXAMPLE

I love you...
from the bottom of my heart to the tips of my toes
I love you....

from the bottom of my heart to the tips of my toes
Loo you to the Moon and back
EXAMPLE
EXAMPLE

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us."
Heb 12:1
EXAMPLE
EXAMPLE

You are my Sunshine
You are my sunshine
tú eres mi sol
EXAMPLE
"There is no footprint too small that it cannot leave an imprint on this world."
“There is no footprint too small that it cannot leave an imprint on this world.”
you are my sunshine
tú eres mi sol
Family thumbprint tree
A picture that reminds you of the people who love and support you and your family.

1. While in the hospital, use ink to put the patient's thumbprint on the tree or template.
2. Write the patient’s name close to their fingerprint.
3. When you leave the hospital, have your family, friends, and support team place their thumbprint on the template. You can use ink or paint for their fingerprint.
4. Have them clean their finger using a baby wipe or soap and water.
5. Lastly, have them write their name somewhere next to their fingerprint.
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