

Play in hospital when your child has additional needs: information for families

Everyone at Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) believes that play shouldn't stop when a child or young person is unwell and needs to come into hospital. In fact, GOSH is committed to helping them to play more. This is just as important – perhaps more so – if they have additional needs. If a child finds it hard to communicate their needs, play can give them an outlet for their feelings. It can also help them learn valuable life skills. Being in hospital is disruptive but play can help to bring some normality to a child's life, so that their development can continue. This information sheet from GOSH gives suggestions on how to encourage your child to play during a hospital visit or stay and how we can help.

Children develop physically, cognitively, socially and emotionally as they grow older. This development is sometimes observed in terms of children reaching 'milestones' in their development – recognisable skills or abilities at or by an expected age.

However, milestones only give a rough idea of what happens and when. Some children reach milestones early, others take a bit longer and some children's development is very different to that of others.

Ideas for play activities in hospital

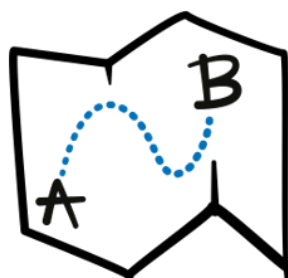
Even though your child is in hospital, there are still lots of things you can do, both to keep them occupied and to support their development.

Here are a few suggestions.

- **Sharing and turn-taking** is a key life skill that is good for all children, whether or not they have additional needs. As well as being a good role model for sharing and turn-taking,

playing can help too. You could develop a gesture, sign or symbol to say "stop" or "wait", depending on your child's needs. This could be incorporated into a game.

- **Physical games** are good for developing skills as well as keeping us fit. You may have to adapt some games and toys, but there are lots of ways your child can get active while they play. For example, boccia is a ball game similar to bowls that can be played by people with cerebral palsy who use a wheelchair. Have a look at our information sheet for further details and suggestions.
- **Read to your child every day.** Bring a few favourite story books from home or most of our playrooms have a selection of books suitable for all ages and abilities. Sit together so your child can see the pictures or use activity books that encourage finding things on the page. Talk about the pictures or the characters and how they might be feeling. The range of books with characters with additional



needs is increasing – ask the play team for suggestions or your local children’s librarian.

Toy and game suggestions

Remember – the playrooms have a wide variety of toys suitable for all ages and abilities. Talk to a member of the play team for ideas. Do not feel your child has to have all of these – they are only suggestions for what may be suitable in a hospital setting.

- Bean bags or a soft ball for throwing and catching
- Activity toys such as hammer/peg boards or shape sorting
- Pretend play, such as a toy hospital kit, a toolbox or play food.
- ‘Small world’ play with little figures (animals or people), cars or trains.
- Stacking and building toys, such as cups or blocks
- Crayons or chunky pencils and paper
- Sensory toys, that have lights or textures – talk to the play team to see if you can borrow something while your child is staying at GOSH.

Further information and support

If you have any questions about play facilities at GOSH, preparing your child for procedures or play in general, please contact the **Play** team on 020 7829 8849. You can also look at the Play webpages at www.gosh.nhs.uk/wards-and-departments/departments/clinical-support-services/play-information-parents-and-visitors

The **Learning Disabilities** team at GOSH can also talk to you about suitable toys and equipment for children and young people with additional needs. Call 020 7813 8465 or email learning.disability@gosh.nhs.uk.

Remember to bring their favourite cuddly toy or comfort item. This will be very important to your child during their hospital stay.

At GOSH our playrooms also have a wide variety of toys suitable for all ages and abilities. Although our playrooms are closed during the pandemic, our play team can still help and advise you on toys or activities for your child. Health play specialists and play workers will support you and your child throughout their hospital visit.

Things to remember

Toys should come with the CE mark that shows they have been tested to be safe for the specific age group.

Be careful with toys with little pieces – these are not suitable for toddlers, who may put things in their mouth.

The most important thing for young children is to spend time with **YOU** and to have fun together! You will help them to feel safe and to cope during their hospital visit.

