Ways to support kids and teens beyond the initial conversation

- Listen, reassure and answer questions honestly.
- Frequent updates/conversations, make sure the child's imagination is not leading them to inappropriate conclusions
- Keep routine up as much as possible and discuss changes
- Allow child's lead on contact/ visiting the person who is sick
- Create support network that includes support for kids/teens
- Encourage outlets for sharing and expression
- Let school, church, coach(etc) know what is happening
- Get support for yourself so you can best support the kids/teens
- Don't be afraid to show your own emotions.
- You may notice behavioural changes with your child/adolescent e.g. return of bed wetting, having melt downs over seemingly insignificant issues.
- Avoid making the illness or even dying a 'taboo' subject.

Further Support:

Please do not hesitate to contact the Departments Clinical Charge Nurse if you have any questions or concerns.

Resources available :

Skylight – helps children, young people and their families and whanau deal with change, loss, trauma and grief. www.skylight.org.nz or 0800299100

RD4U (UK) - For young people (11 – 9 yrs) by young people after the death of someone close. www.rd4u.org.uk

Winston's Wish (UK) – supporting children, teens and their families. www.winstonwish.org.uk

Dougy Centre (USA) – offers grief support for children teen and parents. www.dougy.org

Feedback : We welcome feed back on our service
Department of Critical Care Medicine,
Auckland City Hospital,
Private Bag 92 024 Auckland Mail Centre,
Auckland 1142

Filename : What do we tell the kids?
Issued by : DCCM Senior Nurses
Authorised by : DCCM Quality Group
Reviewed : September 2011

What do we tell the kids?

When their loved one is a patient in the Critical Care

Here are some general guide lines
to assist families/whanau when
talking with their children

The known can be less scary than the unknown

Children have the same wants and needs as adults when it comes to knowing what is happening with their mother, father, and grandparent or close family member. Protecting a child/adolescent by not telling them things can make them feel isolated.

Because children possess strong observational skills but do not possess the maturity to correctly interpret all their observations they can make up frightening things.

Children also need information about their loved one - simple, truthful and repeated.

Allowing the child to participate in a loved ones illness is crucial to maintaining the child's trust in the family.

What to say?

- This can be hard and it may feel uncomfortable.
- Don't wait for the right time.
- Use language they can understand
- Ask the child what they know already. Let them take the lead on how much or how little they want to know
- Don't be surprised if a child changes the subject.
- Younger children will often bounce off to play- don't worry, they may not understand the seriousness of the illness but they do understand something has changed
- Keep information bite-sized. They will take on information as they are ready.
- Repeat information if they need to hear it again. Gently check they have understood what you have told them.
- Give children permission to ask questions - these should be answered as honestly and directly as possible. Be aware that children can ask very blunt questions, even about unpleasant details – they are naturally curious.
- It is okay to say "I don't know" or "I don't know that answer right now"
- Provide reassurance
    - They did not cause this
    - They will always be looked after
    - This will not happen to them

Visiting the patient for the first time

- Visiting an ICU or even the waiting room can be overwhelming, even for the adult. The child should be given the opportunity to decide whether or not he/she wants to visit the loved one. If the child does not want to visit the waiting room or their loved one in the ICU, their decision should be honoured
- Remember the visit is for the child. Be there to support, guide and answer any questions the child may have.
- Prepare your children what to expect in an age appropriate manner.
- The child should be told in advance whether or not their loved one will be able to respond or not.
- The loved one's appearance should be described. Prepare the child what to expect, e.g. tubes, ventilator, IV pumps, monitor. Explain that all the devices in the room are to make their loved one feel better or more comfortable. This will reassure the child. There is a poster in the waiting room that shows a patient in a typical bed space.
- Inform the child about the monitor noises and alarms they may hear, unusual smells and lots of different people coming into the bed space. This is normal for this environment.
- Invite them to be part of the care in a way that fits for them. For example making posters or cards for the room, draw a picture, write a poem.
- After the visit have some quiet time with the child to sit with the child and ask if he or she has any questions regarding the visit. More questions may come later.