



association for the wellbeing
of children in healthcare

AWCH

Policy Relating to the Provision of Play for Children in Hospital

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of children in healthcare

'helping you help kids'



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The Association for the Wellbeing of Children in Healthcare (AWCH) is a national, non-profit organisation of parents, professionals and community members who work together to ensure the emotional and social needs of children, adolescents and their families are recognised and met within hospitals and the health care system in Australia. We believe in:

- access to quality healthcare for all children and young people
- valuing the opinions of children, young people and their families in the delivery of healthcare
- families playing a vital role supporting children and young people receiving healthcare
- fostering partnerships between parents/carers and health care providers
- the provision of culturally sensitive healthcare services
- appropriate information and resources being readily accessible
- challenging the status quo to advance our mission

AWCH tries to ensure a holistic family-oriented approach to the care of children, acknowledging that families are the main support and strength for children and young people when they are

PREAMBLE

Play is essential to the growth and development of children. It fulfils a number of functions and needs for children from birth through to adolescence. Play may be defined as the medium children utilise to learn about themselves and their environment. It provides them with unique opportunities to practise the complex processes of living, communicating and developing relationships with others.

Play also facilitates physical growth, social, intellectual and emotional development and psychomotor learning. It is a means of expression and it provides opportunities for achievement of goals, development of self-esteem and constructive occupation.

The healthy child in a familiar and secure environment, such as home, school or an early childhood service, requires little encouragement to engage in all types of play. However, a hospital is a strange and sometimes threatening environment and children may require assistance to play to allow them to express their fears and anxieties relating to hospitalisation.

Play for children in hospital introduces some normality into the child's day within the unfamiliar hospital environment. It can provide an opportunity for peer interaction and reduce the degree of developmental regression that some children may experience during hospitalisation.

Play can be used by the hospital play specialists, as part of the health care team, to enhance or facilitate treatment programmes for all children, including those with additional needs, such as those with developmental disabilities, the child in isolation, children from non English-speaking backgrounds and those children requiring palliative care.

In the context of this policy, it must be remembered that play has many therapeutic qualities and is a valuable adjunct to a child's treatment programme. However, it is not a treatment in itself unless it is implemented by people qualified in early childhood education, education or health sciences (with a play specialty major), and who have experience with hospitalised children, and who are accredited by the Australasian Association of Hospital Play Specialists.

The Association for the Welfare of Child Health has developed the following *Policy on the Provision of Play for Children in Hospital* so that those involved in paediatric care may be guided within their own paediatric setting.

POLICY STATEMENTS

- Hospitals that routinely accept children should include in their hospital and ward policies, statements relating to the provision of play for children in hospital.
- Hospitals that accept children should employ appropriately qualified play specialists: to plan play programmes for children of all ages; to provide appropriate play activities for children with special needs; to encourage and assist children to benefit from play activities; and to increase the understanding of parents and other members of the health care team in all aspects of play for children. The services of such play specialists should be extended to outpatient departments.
- Hospitals that accept children should provide an adequate budget for the wages and salaries of an appropriate number of play specialists and the purchase and maintenance of play equipment, materials and toys.
- Children should have access to indoor and outdoor play facilities.
- Play facilities in and adjacent to children's wards should be equipped with a variety of safe play materials, toys and equipment adaptable to the range of ages and needs of children usually admitted to that ward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Statement 1

Hospitals that routinely accept children should include in their hospital and ward policies, statements relating to the provision of play for children in hospital.

- That hospital play policy is formulated according to a sound philosophy on play, which gives recognition to the developmental, therapeutic and social effects of play on children of all ages and abilities.
- That such policies recognise the need for play specialists to be included in the team of health care professionals assessing, planning and evaluating each child's total care programme.
- That such policies ensure that those responsible for the provision of play for children in hospital establish aims and objectives that are compatible with the stated policy and that can be achieved through appropriate play programmes. Such aims and objectives should be developed in collaboration with other specialist staff involved in the child's care and thus not be contraindicated during other forms of intervention.
- That such policies readily identify the need for play services in all departments that are regularly involved in paediatric health care.

Statement 2

Hospitals that accept children should employ appropriately qualified play specialists: to plan play programmes for children of all ages; to provide appropriate play activities for children with special needs; to encourage and assist children to benefit from play activities; and to increase the understanding of parents and other members of the health care team in all aspects of play for children. The services of such play specialists should be extended to outpatient departments.

- That where possible persons responsible for the provision of play for children in hospital are employed solely in that role and are not required to fulfil multiple roles with responsibilities in other areas.
- That those persons responsible for the provision of play for children in hospital have relevant experience and/or qualifications which may include child care, normal growth and development, health studies and recreation.
- That a separate play department be established in paediatric facilities that employ 2 or more play specialists or that cater for a minimum of 35 children on average daily bed occupancy statistics and that an identifiable career structure for play specialists exists within the department.
- That hospital play specialists be recognised within the structure of the hospital system and be given an appropriate title, for example:
 - Director of Children's Play Programme/Head Recreationist
 - Play Specialist/Children's Recreationist/Recreational Therapist.
- That play specialists are afforded opportunities to update and expand their knowledge and skills through in-service education and attendance at seminars and conferences.
- That play specialists be accountable for the care that they provide to children and that the services are evaluated in accordance with the hospital quality assurance policy.

Statement 3

Hospitals that accept children should provide an adequate budget for the wages and salaries of an appropriate number of play specialists and the purchase and maintenance of play equipment, materials and toys.

- That funding be available to establish play programmes organised and run by a play specialist who has relevant qualifications and experience.
- That an appropriate number of play specialists be employed and that the number be determined according to a ratio of one play specialist for up to 25 children. Appropriate assistance should be provided to ensure that adequate individualised attention is accorded to the needs of all children. The minimum number of children to justify the employment of a play specialist being 10 on average daily bed occupancy statistics.
- That the wages, salaries and conditions of play specialists be determined in accordance with an appropriate industrial award or enterprise agreement.
- That the Head of the Play Department or the most senior staff member administers the play component of the hospital budget.
- That adequate funding is available for the provision of consumable items for play and for the replacement and/or maintenance of broken toys and equipment.
- That where appropriate and available, hospitals should make use of toy libraries, including toy libraries for children with disabilities, where a large range of specialised equipment and toys are available.

Statement 4

Children should have access to indoor and outdoor play facilities.

- That all children's wards have an area within the ward designated primarily for children's play activities.
- That the indoor play areas be equipped with adequate storage for play equipment and craft materials.
- That where possible an outdoor play area be situated adjacent to the children's ward.
- That the outdoor play area be provided with adequate weatherproof storage for play equipment.
- That where an existing children's ward cannot arrange for access to a suitable outdoor area, some arrangement be made for access to an alternative indoor area which is large enough to facilitate gross motor and group bed activities.

✚ NOTE: Some traditional outdoor play activities can be satisfactorily provided indoors (e.g. water and sand play) so that outdoor weather conditions do not preclude play with materials which have the potential for creative activity.

- That all play areas be provided with access ways for beds, wheelchairs and other mobility aids.
- That the outdoor play area has adequate shade facilities in accordance with the recommendations from the Australian Cancer Council.
- Separate recreational/play areas are provided for younger children and adolescents to cater for different recreational needs.

Statement 5

Play facilities in and adjacent to children's wards, should be equipped with a variety of safe play materials, toys and equipment adaptable to the range of ages and of children usually admitted to that ward.

- That toys be chosen with regard to their safety, durability and versatility. All toys should achieve Australian Safety Standards requirements.
- That all toys should be able to be cleaned as recommended in the play department/hospital infection control policy. Soft toys are not appropriate for hospitalised children, as they cannot be adequately cleaned after use. Bath toys are also not appropriate, as they cannot be adequately drained after use, making them a possible infection control hazard.
- That a range of different types of play be encouraged, such as exploration, investigation, manipulation, and problem solving, through the ready availability of appropriate play.

Contact Information



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Association for the Wellbeing of Children in Healthcare (AWCH)

ABN 33 119 036 261

Bldg 7, Gladesville Hospital, Cnr Victoria & Punt
Roads, GLADESVILLE NSW 2111

T: 02 9817 2439

F: 02 9879 4346

Parent Line: 1800 244 396 (outside Sydney)

E: awch@awch.com.au

W: www.awch.org.au

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