

Should I Bring the Children to Say Goodbye?

When a loved one is dying, give your child a choice about coming to the hospital or not. If they choose to come to the hospital, give them more choices. Ask if they want to remain in the waiting room, or visit their loved one in the room. Giving children choices helps them feel in control.

When visiting at bedside to say goodbye, prepare your child before going to the room. Talk with them about what medical equipment they will see. You can show photos of the equipment to your child ahead of time. Do your best to explain what the equipment does. *"This machine helps push air into Grandma's lungs to help her breathe."* Your child may want to bring a drawing or toy to share with their loved one.

Help your child feel comfortable when entering the room. Invite them to bring a drawing or card. Or they can bring a book to read aloud.

When you arrive to the room, offer your child a few choices to help them feel comfortable. *"You can hold her hand if you would like. Or you can sing the ABCs for her. Her eyes are closed, but she can still hear you."* Your child may not feel comfortable talking or touching. That is okay, too.

Some children may not want to go in the room. They may be more comfortable staying in the waiting room. That is okay. The idea of "saying goodbye" is very abstract. Most young children will not understand what that means. Do not force a young child to visit at bedside, or to "say goodbye" if they are not comfortable.

Most children do best with short visits. One minute per year of age works well. For example, a three minute visit for a three year old. Some children may need more time. Give your child the time they need. Watch for signs that your child is ready to go. "Bored" and "hungry" are often code for "ready to go."

When possible, keep hospital trips short. If your child will have to spend time in the family room or lobby, make sure there is an adult to stay with them. Offer opportunities to play while waiting. You can bring simple crafts, coloring, and other activities from home. Play supports coping skills.

Learn more at www.urmc.rochester.edu/childrens-hospital/bereavement.

