

Live Inspired

How to Make Your Hospital Stay Less Stressful

By *CHRISTINE KNAPP*



My son recently underwent a major brain surgery. We are now six weeks post-op, and while it's been a bumpy road to get here, he is finally recovering well. We spent seven days at a large, national children's hospital and then another eight days at a local children's hospital closer to home where my son received inpatient rehabilitation. The

experience has opened my eyes, and I want to share some things that may help you if you are also experiencing, or will experience, a lengthy stay or admission at a hospital for your child.

Here are a few ideas to help make your stay less stressful:

Take people up on their offers to help

“Let me know what I can do to help.” This phrase. It’s a paradox of friendliness and unawareness. The people that say it, they really do want to help, it’s just that they don’t know *how* or *what to do* to help. As someone who knows what you go through on a daily basis as a special needs mom, I know you would rather your friend or loved one simply prepare a meal and drop it off, take your keys and fill up your gas tank from all the shuffling to and from therapies, or grab your overflowing laundry and come back with a clean pile, than have to respond with what you *really* need. So, most of the time we brush off these requests, say a polite thank you, and handle things ourselves. I am here to tell you – if your child is in the hospital, take people up on their offers to help! My sister-in-law and brother really wanted to help when we were recently admitted, so I asked if they could make a few meals to freeze so that we could heat them up in the microwave. Of course, because they are immediate family, she made more than a few, which was so helpful to us! Other friends sent us Postmates or OfferUp gift cards, so we could order take-out meals. For those that ask, let them know that a gift card for a meal delivery service beats cafeteria food any day. While meals and food delivery were most helpful to us, it may be something totally different for you. These are the times where it is OK to let others know what you need, and to *accept* the help.

Bring some comforts of home

I like coffee. What I dislike, however, is being awakened at 7am to a hospital room full of neurosurgery attendings and residents while being half-awake/half asleep to discuss my child’s post-surgery complications and progress. The herd of gowned doctors trampling in the doorway before the sunrise, scrambling to be up front and touch or shine a flashlight in my son’s eyes, made me bleary-eyed and disoriented. Therefore, we brought our Keurig to the hospital, along with the coffee we like, and we were able to make a cup at 6:59 am each morning without having to stumble downstairs to the cafeteria and be seen in public (also, it’s a great money-saving technique)! They may ask to have someone from the safety or fire team come inspect it to make sure it’s not a fire hazard, but then you will have your coffee ready to go after that. Another great idea that came from a friend in a moms Facebook group was to bring a string of lights, such as Christmas tree lights, and use them to give a little lighting to the room. It created a nice ambiance, especially in the evenings after my son went to bed, to read and not feel like there was a bright, fluorescent light in the

room. I can't tell you how many people commented on this one little string of lights! My child's favorite toy, stuffed animal and blanket helped comfort him, and we also arranged the barrage of cards and gifts we received from loved ones on the walls to give the room some love (and color). Whatever reminds you of home, bring it. Create it. You may be there awhile, and it's OK to make your space functional and as cozy as possible. Oh! Bring your own pillow, too (if allowed).

Eliminate surprise (as much as possible)

At our children's hospital, they offered a tour prior to my son's surgery to show us the waiting area and rooms we would be in following his operation. I researched online specific "comfort hold" techniques so that if my child had to receive an injection or IV, I knew of the best way to make him more at ease (which, in turn, made me more at ease). I bought a book about going to the hospital and tried to explain to him where we would be going and what would happen when we got there. I talked with other families who had been in my shoes before me and solicited their advice on how my son might feel after surgery, what meds to ask for, which meds to avoid, and what to expect in terms of recovery. I spoke with our neurosurgeon about possible complications, the likelihood of those complications, and our plan if they did occur. It seems like there are always surprises at the hospital, but when there are some surprises that can be eliminated, do your best to prepare and educate yourself ahead of time and have a plan in place for things that may occur.

Be fierce!

I already know, if you are reading this, that you are your child's biggest advocate. In a hospital setting, it can be easy to take a back seat because you don't want to risk offending anyone, and you assume everyone knows how to do his or her job. Plus, it might be out of your nature to be confrontational or assertive. The truth is, NO ONE knows your child better than you. I had to ask a doctor to wash her hands and put on new gloves before she went to touch the drain in my son's head after his brain surgery because she had just touched the lid to the trash can and then touched her phone! All I could think of was keeping potential germs and infection as far away as possible, and that is everyone's job, not just the doctors. So, more than just being an advocate, stand tall and proud. Being fierce means speaking up when it might be easier to just hang by the bedside. It means asking people to step outside to talk instead of coming into the room while your child is napping. It means having your nurse put a sign on the door that it is "quiet time" to give yourself a reprieve from constant interruptions. And it most certainly means asking for another doctor, nurse, or opinion if you feel something is off. You can be fierce in a loving way, but this is a time to take a very active role in your child's care.

What are the ways you've made your hospital stay less stressful?

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CHRISTINE KNAPP

Writer, blogger and digital marketing specialist, Christine is the mama of her amazing perinatal stroke survivor. Her “why” is to continue to provide support and make sure no parent ever feels alone on his/her journey, and she began writing to give hope to other parents of children with special needs. Her son continues to grow and thrive, and you can follow their story on her [blog, Our Beautiful Hope](#) .

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