

**Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health
Partnership NHS Trust**

**Children visiting
patients in
Psychiatric
Hospitals/Units**

**Multi-agency
Protocol 6a**

CHILDREN VISITING PATIENTS IN PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALS:

You are responsible for the welfare and safety of the patients and visitors on your Ward. You may therefore at times have to make decisions about access for visitors which they may not be happy about. However, you have a right to expect them to behave reasonably and responsibly and provided that your decisions are based on sound professional judgement, you have a right to expect back-up and support from Senior Managers.

Particular care is needed when children are visiting patients on psychiatric wards and the following guidance is deigned to assist you in this.

1. You must always act in what you believe to be in the child's best interests, whilst also ensuring that the dignity and privacy of patients is respected.
2. The more information you have about the child and his/her relationship with the patient, the easier it will be to know what is likely to be best for the child.
3. Other than in emergencies, decisions about children visiting should be team decisions and potential difficulties should be able to be anticipated to a great extent.
4. Remember that you have a right to refuse a visit or to limit the duration or timing of it. Reasons should be recorded in the notes.
5. It is not unreasonable to ask for prior notice of a visit, particularly where the patient may be experiencing high levels of distress.
6. Ask all visitors to sign in and out so that you know who is on the Ward.
7. If you are concerned about the activity or atmosphere on the Ward, consider if there is an alternative venue which could be used. This will depend on the health of the patient and the degree of responsibility the accompanying adult is willing/able to accept.
8. Consider the appropriateness of a visit in the patient's own room, whether the visitor can reach there safely and how you would monitor the visit if you had any concerns.
9. Decisions about where the visit should take place will be influenced not only by the atmosphere on the Ward at the time, but also by the nature of the problems of the other patients. Are there patients who may pose particular risks to children because of their behaviour, attitudes or beliefs?

10. You have a right to expect a responsible adult to remain with the child throughout the visit. Do ask that adult to remove the child from the Ward if (s)he becomes distressed or if you have concerns about safety.
11. Do consult with Senior staff when possible or notify them of decisions made to refuse access or terminate a visit.
12. Do issue visitors with the leaflet on visiting and offer to discuss any particular difficulties which they consider that they have.