



## Royal Manchester Children's Hospital

# Supporting your child after a burn injury

Information for Parents and Carers of  
School-aged children



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### **Burns Service**

Royal Manchester Children's Hospital, Oxford Road,  
Manchester, M13 9WL

Telephone 0161 701 8123 Open  
24 hours, 7 days a week

### **Burns and Plastics After Care Clinic**

Royal Manchester Children's Hospital, Oxford Road,  
Manchester, M13 9WL

Telephone 0161 701 9250

## Introduction

Wherever you are in caring for your child after sustaining a burn, we hope that this leaflet gives some pointers as to what you might expect and some suggestions as to how you might best support your child now and into the future. Whatever else you may take away from this, we hope that you will learn that you are not on your own – the burn care team is here to support you and your child.

## Trauma and children

It is common for children to experience some traumatic stress symptoms following a serious injury such as a burn. Any kind of accident, injury or painful procedure can have a traumatic impact on a child. However, there are many things that their family and friends can do to support a child's recovery. It is also important to be aware that there is no relationship between the severity of the burn and the stress and distress that the injury may cause the family. Therefore, having a burn injury can be a traumatic experience for the young person's family and friends, whether the injury is severe or minor.

## Common feelings following a burn injury

The experience of a burn injury can leave children with a range of difficult feelings to cope with, which can include:

- Fear
- Helplessness
- Shame
- Guilt
- Anger
- Sadness
- Weakness
- Feeling different from everybody else
- Feeling isolated from family and friends

Because of this they may need extra support and comfort from their family and friends to help deal with their feelings.

## How children might react to a traumatic experience

The burn injury experience may preoccupy your child's thoughts, feelings and behaviours for a long time after the accident has actually happened. Below are some common reactions to a frightening event.

- **Avoidance**

Your child might try to avoid certain situations, people or places that remind them about what happened.

- **“Re-living”**

Your child may experience upsetting thoughts or images about what has happened, as if they are “re-living” the experience. They may also think about how they could have stopped the incident from happening.

- **Acting or re-creating the event through play**

The things that children are thinking about may be expressed through ‘traumatic play’ where they try to re-enact what they have experienced. This type of play can mean that a child is still focusing on their experiences and/or that they are trying to understand what happened to them in a way that is meaningful to them.

- **Feeling alert and poor concentration**

Children may feel more jumpy, because the brain has put the body into ‘super safe mode’, where the body is always on the lookout for danger. Your child might become more irritable or jump at noises more than they did before their injury. This can mean that they find it difficult to concentrate.

- **Poor sleep**

As your child's body may feel more alert, they may have trouble sleeping, experience nightmares, night terrors or have a fear of falling asleep.

- **Mood changes**

Children may move between being very shy, clingy, quiet and withdrawn, to uncharacteristic aggressive behaviour.

- **Loss of abilities/skills or acting like a younger child**

A child's feelings of worry or of being afraid may express themselves as a loss of abilities or skills that they have already learnt. For example, children may not be able to fall asleep on their own, be left at school or

play outside on their own without a family member present. In some cases children may also complain of physical symptoms such as headaches or stomach aches.

## **How parents/carers might react to a traumatic experience**

It is common for parents/carers to become over protective towards their child after such an injury and want to indulge them to compensate them for what they are going through. This can also be because they feel that they have failed to protect their child from harm.

Parents/carers can feel helpless and overwhelmed when their child is undergoing a lot of medical treatments and are uncertain about what they can do to help. This can create a lot of anxiety for parents/carers. It can be helpful to make a note of any questions or concerns you have and talk to hospital staff involved in your child's care. Being involved in your child's care as much as possible can help to reduce this.

## **Normal reactions to being in hospital**

For most children being in hospital is a new experience, and like all new experiences the unknown can be frightening and confusing. There are some things that may be quite upsetting for children staying on the Burns Unit, including:

- Uncertainty about what will happen to them.
- Being left alone in an unfamiliar environment.
- Being in pain or going through painful procedures.
- Having a very noticeable burn injury.
- Fears about what others will think about them being injured or in hospital.
- Seeing or hearing other children who have been hurt.
- Fears of death or dying.

## Your child in hospital: Helping them cope

**Allow your child to talk about their feelings and worries if they want to.** Reassure your child that being upset and scared is normal after a burn injury. If your child does not want to talk about what happened, they could play or draw a picture to explain their feelings.

**Remember that you are the best person to help.** Although it may be difficult at times, try to reassure and calm your child by giving them frequent hugs and praise. Remind your child that the medical staff have a lot of experience in helping other young people.

**Be patient.** Although intense feelings are common they are often only temporary responses to the hospital experience. Remind your child that it is okay to feel angry, confused or scared and to talk about their feelings. **Recognise that your child may want to feel 'grown-up'** whilst also feeling afraid and in need of comfort and support.

**Be honest.** Young people want information even though they may not always ask. If your child needs to go through a painful procedure, it is good to be honest about the fact that it will hurt, but also explain that its purpose is to help them get better. The more your child knows what to expect, the more comfortable and secure they will feel.

**Where possible include your child in discussions about their care and treatment.** Encourage your child to ask their own questions of the doctors and nurses. It may also be useful to help your child participate in decision-making by planning how to cope with painful and stressful procedures in advance.

**Talk together about your feelings.** Children often know more than they will admit, but in some cases they may misinterpret information or other people's feelings. Don't be afraid to discuss what has happened with your child. It may be useful to gently ask your child questions to find out what they think and believe about what is happening to them, and in turn share your thoughts, feelings and reactions with them.

Although it may be difficult in hospital, **try to help your child establish a relaxing and calming routine at bedtime.** This may be a time when young people feel able to ask questions, share worries and fears and be reassured.

If your child wakes up frightened, try to reassure them immediately and explain that they are safe. Ask them if they have had a 'scary dream' and allow them to talk about their dream if they can.

If you are not sleeping near to your child, check with them during the day whether they are having any difficulties sleeping, or having any nightmares. If they are, reassure them that this is very normal after a traumatic experience and encourage them to talk about any scary dreams that they have had.

**Children can be self-conscious,** and may be especially worried about how they look and fit in with others, and about their privacy. Reassure your child, but also be honest. Try to find ways of respecting and supporting your child's privacy and dignity. Allow your child to do some things on their own with regard to their care.

**Scarring.** It is important to give your child the opportunity to express how they feel about their injury, whilst at the same time recognising that the appearance of their injury will change over time.

**Help your child stay in touch with their friends.** Encourage your child to stay in contact with their friends by telephone, online or enabling them to visit them in hospital.

**Respond appropriately to challenging behaviour.** Your child may respond to being in hospital with challenging behaviour such as aggression and anger. Try to remember that these behaviours are common in young people who have had a traumatic experience, and in most cases these behaviours are only temporary. Remember that it is alright to stick to normal rules and limits just as you would have done before the injury.

**Be consistent!** Only consistent responses for both misbehaviour and good behaviour will help young people learn that good behaviour is expected. It is particularly important that parents/carers are consistent with each other. Remember that setting boundaries and being consistent helps young people **feel calm and safe**.

**Always tell your child when and why you are leaving and when you will be coming back.** Young children are often more affected than older children by being left alone. If you cannot stay with your child in hospital try to have a family member or close friend stay with your child as much as possible.

**Take care of yourself.** You have also been through a traumatic experience and may be feeling worried or upset. Don't be afraid to ask friends, family or the hospital staff for support. Talking about your feelings can be very helpful. Nursing staff on the Burns Unit will be able to offer you advice and support.



## Your child after hospital: Things you can do to help

**Let your child know they are safe.** Children may need extra hugs, praise and support after being in hospital.

**Going back to where the accident happened.** Understandably, many families worry about this, but it need not be a big problem for you and your child. For many children the accident will have happened at home. If your child is old enough, check out whether they have any worries about going back to where the accident happened and talk about how these worries can be addressed. For example, if the accident happened in the bath, your child may become distressed about having a bath once they are home.

Discuss this with your child; explain that it is normal to feel anxious and that you will come up with an alternative to having a bath until they feel less anxious. Once the child is home, if needed, allow them to wash without having to use a bath but gradually start to expose them to the bath. One way is to allow them to see a sibling or parent having fun in the bath and then gradually encourage them to join in.

Gradually exposing your child to the place of the accident and showing that you or other family members feel safe and confident there will help to reduce their anxiety and increase their confidence.

**Allow your child to talk about their feelings and worries if they want to.** Let them know that worries, fears and upsetting thoughts are normal. Try not to assume that simply because your child has not said anything about the traumatic experience that they are fine and not affected by it. Your child may be confused by what has happened, they may want to avoid talking about it, or are afraid to show their vulnerability.

If they do not want to talk to you, it may be useful to ask them if they would feel more comfortable talking to someone else, either another family member or friend or someone at the hospital.

**Get back to normal routines as soon as possible.** Help your child get enough sleep, eat regularly, and get back to doing things with friends. Finding comfortable routines will help your child cope. Encourage your child to listen to favourite music, or do other normal activities if they are able. This is a time to keep routines quite simple at home.

**Increase the amount of time you and your child spend with family and friends.** Young people, who receive extra support from friends and family, seem to cope better after upsetting or traumatic events.

**Maintain the strategies and limits that you set on inappropriate behaviour,** which you have been using whilst your child was in hospital. Or, if this was difficult to do in hospital, get back to the normal rules and limits you had in place before the injury. Remember, consistency is vital!

**Going back to school.** Going back to school after a burn injury can feel scary for a child, but getting back to their normal routine as soon as possible will really help with their adjustment back into home and school life. **It may take time for your child to settle back into school so it is important to encourage your child to progress and reintegrate at a pace that suits them.**

To help your child return to school as soon as they are ready, the Burns team offers a comprehensive school reintegration programme. This programme includes providing your child's school with a booklet which contains information about burns injuries, ongoing treatment, care that is required and answers to a number of frequently asked questions, to address any concerns the school may have. The team can also arrange for representatives of the Burns Service Multi- Disciplinary Team (MDT) to visit your child's school and provide an educational and interactive presentation to your child's classmates and teachers. The presentation teaches children about common types of burn injuries, first aid advice for flame burns and scalds, as well as information about the treatment patients may receive in hospital.

The team will also teach the class about the importance of valuing, respecting and caring for one another and encourage the children to think about how they would like to be treated when returning to school after a burn injury.

It is helpful to talk to your child and their school about:

- What does your child want other children to be told?
- How is your child going to deal with questions and comments from other children?
- How can the school support them with this?
- Is it going to be a part-time return initially?
- What support is going to be put in place to help your child catch up on any missed work?
- Do any special arrangements need to be put in place?

## Meeting People

After a burn injury, some parents struggle with other people's reactions and/or interest in their child's injury. This can leave you feeling angry, upset or worried about going out with your child. It may feel as if the only answer is to stop going out. This may protect you and your child from possible negative reactions but you may miss out on much needed social contact. Playing and mixing with other children is important to their growth and depending on your child's age it is likely that your child will start to handle reactions to his/her appearance on their own.

If you can learn to handle other people's reactions confidently then you will be able to role-model these skills for your child. If you or your child are still finding it difficult to cope with other people's reactions on a daily basis or if you/your child are stopping going out, the organization 'Changing Faces' ([www.changingfaces.org.uk](http://www.changingfaces.org.uk)) has provided some useful self-help guides for parents of children with a changed appearance.

## Looking after yourself

**Take time to deal with your own feelings.** It may be harder for you to help your child if you are worried or upset. Try to talk about your feelings with your family and friends. Keep in mind that your own behaviour is a powerful example for your child, and how they cope with an event will depend, to some extent, on how you appear to cope. Your child will be looking to the adults around them to find positive ways to deal with the event. Try to make sure that you get enough sleep, eat well-balanced meals and try to stick to regular routines.

**Seek support from others.** Because you are also responding to the trauma, it is very important to talk to other parents, friends, counsellors and/or Burns Team staff. Share your anxieties and frustrations with them, and don't be afraid to ask for help.

**Remember that people in your own family may react different ways.** Remember too that your child's feelings may be very different to yours and that siblings may feel upset as well.

**Families who have been treated by the service tell us that with help and support from the Burns Team, the impact of the injury is greatly reduced over time. The recovery process is often helped along by the young person's ability to adjust to what has happened.**

## When and where should I get help for my child?

In the first days after a burn injury, your child may feel confused, upset, anxious and jumpy. This is completely normal, and most young people just need some time before they begin to feel more secure and comfortable.

If there is anything particularly worrying you a few weeks after the injury, such as:

- Your child is still feeling worried, anxious or upset
- They are not doing as well in school or are refusing to go.
- Your child has stopped doing the things they used to enjoy.
- They are getting upset over things that remind them of the burn injury.

Then you may find it useful to talk to our Burn Care Team to find out the best way to help your child and family.

## Do not hesitate to ask for extra support

Caring for and supporting your child after a burn injury is a challenging job and there are likely to be many ups and down. If at any time during this period you have questions, worries or problems that you are struggling with then there are a number of places you can go for help and support.

### **Burns Service Telephone Number: 0161 701 8123**

Nursing staff at the Burns Service will be able to offer you advice and support on many aspects of caring for a burn-injured child. They are not only available to you whilst your child is on the Burns Ward, but they are also on the end of a telephone once you take your child home, anytime, night or day. If you would prefer to speak to a member of staff away from your child, then please just ask.

### **Burns and Plastics After Care Clinic Telephone Number: 0161 701 9250**

Nurses in the Burns and Plastics After Care Clinic are very experienced in burns after-care and scar management and the difficulties families face in caring for their burn-injured child at home. If they are unable to help you with your particular problem or question, then they will be able to find someone who will. They may suggest that you or your child speak to the **Clinical Psychologist** in the Burns Service who can help with any emotional or behavioural worries that you may have about your child or family following the injury. Alternatively you may be introduced to the **Family Support Services** who offer emotional and practical support to parents of children under the care of the hospital on a range of matters.

Whatever your worry or concern, please do not hesitate to get in touch. There are many experienced staff within the Burns Service at Royal Manchester Children's Hospital who understand how difficult and stressful it can be to care for a young person following a burn injury and who will do their best to offer you advice or support.

If your problem cannot be addressed over the telephone and travelling to the hospital is difficult for you, then we will try and find the support that you need close to your home. It can be hard to ask for extra help at times, but the Burns Service understands that parents/carers trying to provide the best care and support for their child will need support themselves to do this.

Please do not hesitate to ask for our **helpful resources leaflet** for further information and support services.

## No Smoking Policy

Please protect our patients, visitors and staff by adhering to our no smoking policy. Smoking is not permitted in any of our hospital buildings or grounds, except in the dedicated smoking shelters in the grounds of our Central Manchester site.

For advice and support on how to give up smoking, go to <http://www.nhs.uk/smokefree>.

## Translation and Interpretation Service

It is our policy that family, relatives or friends cannot interpret for patients. Should you require an interpreter ask a member of staff to arrange it for you.

تتص سياستنا على عدم السماح لافراد عائلة المرضى او اقاربهم او اصدقائهم بالترجمة لهم. اذا احتجت الى مترجم فيرجى ان تطلب ذلك من احد العاملين ليترتب لك ذلك.

بماری یہ پالیسی ہے کہ خاندان ، رشتہ دار اور دوست مریضوں کے لئے ترجمہ نہیں کر سکتے۔ اگر آپ کو مترجم کی ضرورت ہے تو عملے کے کسی رکن سے کہیں کہ وہ آپ کے لئے اس کا بندوبست کر دے۔

ইহা আমাদের নীতি যে, একজন রোগীর জন্য তার পরিবারের সদস্য, আত্মীয় বা কোন বন্ধু অনুবাদক হতে পারবেন না। আপনার একজন অনুবাদকের প্রয়োজন হলে তা একজন কর্মচারীকে জানান অনুবাদকের ব্যবস্থা করার জন্য।

Nasze zasady nie pozwalają na korzystanie z pomocy członków rodzin pacjentów, ich przyjaciół lub ich krewnych jako tłumaczy. Jeśli potrzebują Państwo tłumacza, prosimy o kontakt z członkiem personelu, który zorganizuje go dla Państwa.

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我们的方针是，家属，亲戚和朋友不能为病人做口译。如果您需要口译员，请叫员工给您安排。



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