



Royal Manchester Children's Hospital

Supporting your child after a burn injury

Information for Parents and Carers of
Young 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 after a serious injury such as a burn. Any kind of accident or painful procedure can have a traumatic impact on young children, and in some cases this can extend to their family and the people they are most close to. It is also important to be aware that there is no relationship between the severity of the burn and the stress and distress that it might cause the family. Although a traumatic experience, such as a burn injury, can have a big effect on children, there are many things that their family can do to support their recovery.

Common feelings following a burn injury

As young children may not recognise that a situation is dangerous until an accident actually happens, children may be left feeling more helpless and have reduced confidence in how safe they feel. Young children may also find it difficult to deal with their physical and emotional reactions to a traumatic experience and may need extra support and comfort from their family to help them deal with their feelings. Children often struggle to express their feelings with words so they may express them in other ways.

How young 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.

- **Clinginess**

Children can understandably become worried after a frightening event, and demonstrate this by becoming 'clingy' - not wanting to let you out of their sight and continually wanting to be held by you.

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

A young child's feelings of worry or of being afraid may be expressed through the 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 playgroup or nursery or play outside on their own without a family member present. They may lose some words that they have already picked up, or lose some toileting skills. It is very common for young children to display temper tantrums following a traumatic event. In some cases children may also complain of physical symptoms such as headaches or stomach aches.

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

Young children may also have difficulty putting into words what is worrying them or how they are feeling. In some cases, young children may engage in '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.

- **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.

How parents/carers might react to a traumatic experience

It is common for parents to become over-protective towards their child and want to indulge them to compensate for what they are going through or 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 young 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 young children during their stay in hospital.

These may include:

- Being in pain or going through painful procedures such as dressing changes.
- Seeing an injury to their body.
- Being left alone.
- Seeing hospital equipment that looks or sounds scary.
- Seeing or hearing other children who have been hurt.
- Thinking that being in hospital is a punishment.
- Being afraid of 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 your child. Although you may find it difficult, try to reassure your child. Give them lots of praise and hugs.

Be patient with your child. Children can react to being in hospital in many different ways. This can include crying, temper tantrums, whining and being clingy. Try to remember that these behaviours are common in children who have had a traumatic experience like a burn injury and in most cases these behaviours are only temporary.

Ignore inappropriate behaviour. This is often very difficult but a child's behaviour is maintained by the attention it receives, even if this is negative attention. Remember to also **praise your child** for good behaviour and reward them with positive attention, smiles and hugs. If your child's behaviour does become unmanageable, remember that it is alright to decide on and stick to normal rules and limits just as you would have done before the injury.

As it is important to reward children when they are good, there are also times when it is necessary for carers to **control and set limits on inappropriate behaviour**. Not having clearly communicated standards or rules is likely to increase misbehaviour.

Help your child to understand what is happening. When explaining things to your child try to use simple words that your child can understand. If your child needs to go through painful procedures such as dressing changes or surgery it helps to be honest about the fact that the procedure might hurt, but to also explain to your child why they need to have it done.

Talk together about your feelings. Children often know more about what is happening than they will admit. However, they can easily misinterpret what they hear as well. You could ask your child questions to try and understand how much they do know. Remember to reassure your child that they have done nothing wrong and that being in hospital is not a punishment.

Help your child to see hospital staff as people who are trying to help them. Reassure your child that the hospital staff have had a lot of experience helping children like them.

Try to follow your child's normal routines as much as possible whilst they are in hospital. Introducing normal routines into children's time in hospital helps provide comfort and stability for your child. Getting back to their normal routine as soon as possible will really help with their adjustment back into home and nursery life.

Although it may be difficult in hospital, **try to establish a comforting routine at bedtime.** Playing quiet games and storytelling can all add to a child's feeling of security, comfort and well-being. Bedtimes can also provide a quiet time when children feel able to ask questions, share anxieties and fears and be reassured. If your child wakes up frightened, try to reassure them immediately. Ask them if they have had a 'scary dream' and allow them to talk about the dream if they can. Reassure your child that you or staff are nearby and that they are safe.

Helping your child through play. Encourage your child to express their feelings and emotions through play. It may be helpful to observe your child at play and listen to what is said and how your child plays. Often children may express feelings of anger or fear. This is all part of helping your child to cope with their experiences.

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. Young 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.

Get back to your normal routine as soon as you can. Although this may be difficult, getting back to your normal routine at home will provide support and security for your child. Help your child to get enough sleep, eat regularly and spend time with family and friends.

Maintain the plans 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!

Time with close family and friends. It has been found that children who get support from their family and friends seem to cope better after experiencing upsetting events like a burn injury.

Going back to playgroup/nursery. Going back to playgroup or nursery 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 nursery life. It may take time for your child to settle back into playgroup so it is important to encourage your child to progress and reintegrate at a pace that suits them.

To help your child return to nursery as soon as they are ready, the Burns team can provide your child's nursery with a booklet which contains information about burn injuries, ongoing treatment, care that is required and answers to a number of frequently asked questions, to address any concerns the nursery may have. Also, the Burns team can offer a programme to reintegrate and support your child back into nursery. If you would like any more information about this then please ask any member of the Burns Unit or the Burns and Plastics After-Care Clinic staff.

It is helpful to talk to your child's nursery 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 nursery support them with this?
- Is it going to be a part time return initially?

Meeting people

After a burn injury, some parents struggle with other people's reactions and or interest in their child's injury. It might 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. It is important to remember that it is normal for people to notice difference. Spending time with others will be helpful to you and your child as it is through play that children can practice and learn new skills and you can also get support from other adults. If you are finding it hard to cope with other people's reactions on a daily basis or you're not going out with your child, the organisation 'Changing Faces' (www.changingfaces.org.uk) has provided some useful self-help guides for parents of young children with a changed appearance.

Looking after yourself

Your child will be looking to the adults around them to find positive ways to deal with 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 parent, friends, counsellors and/or Burns Team Staff. Share your anxieties and frustrations with them, and don't be afraid to ask for help.

Take time to deal with and think about your own feelings. It is often a lot harder to help your child if you are worried or upset. Try to talk about your feelings with your family and friends.

Remember that people in your own family may react in different ways. Remember that your child's feelings may be very different from 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 child'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 and jumpy. This is completely normal, and most young children 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 very distressed (whiny, clingy).
- They are getting upset over things that remind them of the burn injury.
- Your child has stopped playing or doing things they use to enjoy (e.g. nursery).
- They are having difficulties with returning to their usual routine (e.g. sleeping and eating).

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 downs. 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 to for help and support.

Burns Service – Telephone Number: (0161) 701 8123
Open 24 hours, 7 days a week

Nursing staff in 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 ward, but they are also available by telephone once you take your child home, anytime, night or day, any day of the year. 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 Plastic 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 not able to help you with your particular problem or question, then they will be able to find someone who will. They may suggest that you 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 they may suggest you speak to a member of the **Family Support Service** who offer emotional and practical support to parents/carers 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 the Royal Manchester Children's Hospital who understand how difficult and stressful it can be to care for a young child following a burn injury and 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 closer 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

The NHS has a responsibility for the nation's health.

Protect yourself, patients, visitors and staff by adhering to our no smoking policy. Smoking is not permitted within any of our hospital buildings or grounds.

The Manchester Stop Smoking Service can be contacted on
Tel: (0161) 205 5998 (www.stopsmokingmanchester.co.uk).

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.

تنص سياستنا على عدم السماح لافراد عائلة المرضى او اقاربهم او اصداقناهم بالترجمة لهم. اذا احتجت الى مترجم فيرجى ان تطلب ذلك من احد العاملين ليرتب 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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