



Children's
of Alabama®

E-NEWS for Epilepsy

Child Life, Sunshine School Help Ease Stress During Hospital Stay

By Fairfax Davis, MS, CCLS

Whether you are visiting for an outpatient evaluation or an inpatient admission, we recognize entering our hospital may be stressful and intimidating. Children and families do not always know what to expect.

How a child experiences and processes stress is dependent on his or her age:

- Infant: fear of separation from parents, stranger anxiety
- Toddler: difficulty with change in routine, loss of autonomy (independence)
- Preschool Age: heightened fears of pain and strangers
- School Age: fear of pain, death and anesthesia
- Adolescent: concerns with loss of independence and control, privacy

At Children's of Alabama, programs are in place to help ease any anxieties and provide a sense of normalcy through play, creative expression and education.

What is a Child Life Specialist?

Child Life Specialists focus on decreasing stress and anxiety experienced by children and their families while in the hospital. We provide opportunities for normalcy in a hospital setting through play, offering choices in activities to promote control in an unfamiliar setting. We explain medical procedures in terms children can understand. We identify and correct misconceptions patients may have and encourage appropriate and positive coping techniques during procedures. This helps the child and the family to have a better hospital experience. Child Life Specialists also host a variety of hospital-wide events to help make your child's inpatient admission more fun and a positive experience for the entire family.

As a Child Life Specialist assigned to our Epilepsy Monitoring Unit (EMU), I engage children in play to help keep them calm and distracted during the EEG hookup. I explain the purpose and importance of an EEG to them so that they can understand and feel in control. Children can also feel involved by practicing taking blood pressure, for example.

The Sunshine School Program by Janet Ezekiel, MA, Ed.

The Sunshine School Program is a special program designed to serve the unique educational needs of children with medical and behavioral health issues. Patients are eligible for the free service if their inpatient stay exceeds five days or if chronic illness requires frequent hospitalizations. The patient, caregivers or healthcare providers may also submit referrals. Certified teachers help with academic instruction based on assignments received from the school or individual needs as assessed by the hospital teacher.

In the EMU, seizures are evoked to better understand your child's epilepsy. Sometimes stress associated with schoolwork may elicit a seizure. Children may be instructed during pre-admission to bring schoolwork with them. The hospital teacher works at the bedside with your child and assists with schoolwork while creating an environment that may stimulate seizures. The teacher may also provide valuable information on study tips, homebound school services and career planning.



A patient from the Epilepsy Monitoring Unit enjoys time with R2D2 on National Star Wars Day.



The Auburn University baseball team visits a patient in the EMU.