



COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE:
WHEN YOU HAVE A LOVED ONE IN THE HOSPITAL

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Do you have a loved one that is currently hospitalized? If so, this is likely a very difficult and anxious time for you as well as for your loved one who is hospitalized. It may be distressing and even heart-wrenching to know that your loved one is alone in the hospital and you cannot be by their side. Despite current limited visitation rules, it is important to remember that you can provide vital support and advocacy. Below are tips on how to support and advocate for your family member amidst the COVID-19 outbreak. Helpful resources are also provided.

Provide Emotional Support to Your Loved One

- Talk to your loved one regularly - this can be a lifeline for them
 - Ask hospital staff about available ways to speak to your loved one if they are not awake or alert
- Use loving and compassionate language (e.g., Just wanted to let you know I/we are thinking about you and love you very much)
 - Do not offer unsolicited advice
- Assist with outside responsibilities so that your loved one can focus on getting better
 - Help with care of children, partner, parents, pets
 - Communicate with employer/employees, if asked or if necessary
- [Maintain their privacy](#)
 - Resist the urge to share their situation with others unless your loved one requests that you do so

Provide Additional Emotional Support to Your Loved One if they are Awake and Alert

- Stay in touch with your loved one
 - Send text messages
 - Hand write a card or letter
 - Call and video chat

EMORY

 **Grady**

 **MOREHOUSE**
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE



- Let them know they can reach out to you any time of the day or night
 - Remind them to call you at important times, like when a healthcare team member is in the room or when there is a new test or treatment
- Use active listening skills when you interact with them
 - Focus on them when they are communicating with you – look directly at them
 - Listen without preparing a response
 - Convey using nonverbal behavior (e.g. nod, eye contact, “um hm”) to show that you are listening
 - Paraphrase what you heard in your own words to let them know that you are listening
 - Allow them to fully express their thoughts without interrupting them
 - Ask clarifying questions (e.g. “What do you mean when you say...?”)
 - Refrain from being critical or giving lots of advice
 - Resource: <https://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm>
- Discuss COVID-19 with them in a helpful way if they have the virus
 - Remain calm
 - Be clear, simple, and direct
 - Do not overwhelm them with information
 - Keep current with the latest information and research on COVID-19 (e.g., [CDC](#))
 - Ask for their questions and reactions
 - Listen and validate their fears and concerns
 - Provide comfort, support, and love
 - Let them know you are in this together (e.g. “We will tackle this thing together”)

Advocate for Your Loved One

- Know and convey your loved one’s wishes
 - Review your loved one’s Advance Directive if they have one
 - Support your loved one in creating their Advanced Director if your loved one is awake, alert, and of sound mind and does not have one
 - Ask that the healthcare team assist your loved one with creating an Advance Directive
 - Name a Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare (DPOA) to assist with decision-making if your loved one becomes unable to do so
 - Ensure that the patient’s Durable Power of Attorney knows about their wishes for their care (i.e., care they do/do not want to receive, preferences about resuscitation and intubation)



- Ensure that your loved one's healthcare providers know their care preferences
- Clarify primary points of contact (i.e., the quarterback)
 - Identify the healthcare team point people (e.g., physician, primary nurse each shift, social worker) for the patient's close support team and how to contact them
 - Determine who will be the spokesperson for the patient (and designate one back-up)
 - Consider designating the
 - DPOA for Healthcare named in the loved one's Advance Directive
 - Patient's next of kin, who serves as the DPOA, if the patient does not have an Advance Directive
 - A loved one if the DPOA is uncomfortable speaking with the healthcare team, or has low literacy (however, if the patient is unable to make decisions, all decision-making must be done by the DPOA)
 - Encourage the healthcare team to display the spokesperson's contact information prominently in your loved one's room and at the nurses station
- Maintain regular communication with your loved one's healthcare team if you are the designated point of contact (quarterback)
 - Ask up front what you can expect in terms of communication (once daily is a reasonable expectation unless your loved has a significant worsening in their condition)
 - Agree upon a communication plan
 - Request that the doctor call the spokesperson any time they go into your loved one's room
 - Make clear that if you are the DPOA and your loved one is unable to communicate or advocate for them self that you expect to be kept informed and invited to be involved in decision-making
- Prepare for conversations with the healthcare team
 - Write down your questions - this helps organize the conversation, increases your confidence, and ensures you don't forget to ask your questions
 - Take notes on the responses
 - Review the questions and responses with your loved one if they are awake and alert to engage them in their own care
- Communicate information with the patient's close support network (if approved by your loved one)



- Maintain a secure shared document (google docs, box, etc.) for those involved in the hospitalized person's care that includes pertinent medical and medication history, recent and current diagnoses, treatments provided in the hospital including medications, names and numbers for healthcare providers, insurance information, and other relevant information

Cope with Visitation Barriers

- Identify alternative means of communication
 - Help all parties, including your hospitalized loved one if possible, set up an account on the communication platform of choice (i.e., Zoom, Cisco Webex, FaceTime, Houseparty, Skype, Facebook Messenger, Google Hangouts etc.).
 - Teach your hospitalized loved one how to use the selected platform to answer calls, initiate calls and send messages
- Encourage people in your loved one's support system to communicate with them
 - Make sure family and friends know how to communicate with the person in the hospital
 - Remind them of best times to contact the person in the hospital
 - Encourage them to send cards, plants, gifts or messages of encouragement
- Follow the hospital visitation policies
 - Educate yourself about the hospital's visitation rules – visitation has likely been reduced or eliminated to limit spread of the virus
 - Monitor rules regularly as they change often (e.g., check the website, ask the staff)
 - Check your COVID-related symptoms
 - Monitor your physical health symptoms prior to visiting, if hospital visitation is allowed
 - Remember that to enter the hospital, you will likely be required to participate in a brief medical screening (i.e., take your temperature, identify if you have experienced symptoms in the past few days, etc.)
- Take necessary precautions if you visit your loved one in the hospital
 - Seek instruction from hospital staff on the use of personal protective equipment (mask, gloves etc.....)
 - Wash your hands before entering the hospital room
 - Refrain from touching surfaces when in the hospital room
 - Visit the loved one's room only - do not go to other places in the hospital



Take Care of Yourself

- Do things that bring you pleasure and comfort
- Connect with others on a regular basis
- Ask for help and support from people you trust and can rely upon
- Accept help from others

Further Resources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Healthcare Settings. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-recommendations.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Finfection-control%2Fcontrol-recommendations.html#manage_access
- PsychCentral. Become a Better Listener: Active Listening. <https://psychcentral.com/lib/become-a-better-listener-active-listening/>