



Hospitalization

You've taken your child to the hospital for a suicide risk assessment. If your child answers positively to any of the following questions, a decision may be made to hospitalize them.

- Does your child have intrusive thoughts of dying or harming themselves but doesn't intend to do anything?
- Does your child have a plan to harm himself or others?
- Has your child begun to put that plan into action or rehearsed?
- Has your child made an attempt or is behaving impulsively so that acting on that plan is likely?

If the decision is made to hospitalize your child, what do you do? First, take a deep breath and remember that this is not about your parenting. If you feel you may fall apart, excuse yourself and go to the rest room. Take a few minutes to calm down and come back prepared to listen.

Write down all pertinent information, including the names of all the doctors and hospital staff to whom you talk. Ask as many questions as you need. There are no stupid questions at a time like this. Some of the answers, however, may not be available until your child has been in the hospital for a few days.

Be prepared to wait if the hospital doesn't have a bed available for your child immediately. If you have to wait with your child, recognize they are probably as upset as you are. If you're up to it, remind your child that it has taken courage to make this decision, and that it is the first step to getting their life back on track again.

The hospitalization itself may actually be one of the easiest parts of this process. You know your child is safe while a more thorough assessment of suicide risk and treatment needs is completed. Their discharge from the hospital may be harder, especially for you. Once your child is discharged, the responsibility falls back on you.

So, again, the place to start is with yourself. You've got to take care of yourself before you can take care of your child. Your worries and anxieties are natural. How will you manage them? This is definitely a stressful time so use coping techniques like exercise, prayer, or talking with a friend. You may even want to see a mental health clinician yourself. If you have people in your life who can't understand what you and your family are going through, take a vacation from them. You don't need 'negative nellyes' whispering unsupportive things in your ear.

Following the discharge recommendations will also help, even if you don't completely understand what they mean at first. You may hear words like PHP or IOP. These stand for Partial Hospital Program or Intensive Outpatient Program. These are places your child will go for a big part of the day for a variety of therapeutic activities.