Let's Talk About...

School

While your child is in the hospital, your first concern is about medical care. It is important to think about school issues too. Addressing school issues early will help ease your child's return to school. This will relieve your child's worries about being away from school or friends.

Communication with your child's school may be as simple as talking with a teacher or counselor about absences and arranging for homework. With your permission, the hospital's Education Specialist can also help with school contacts. School Services at Primary Children's Hospital can help your child continue schooling and help identify school resources.

What do I do about absences from school?

Students with medical issues often miss school. Your child may miss a few hours for medical appointments or several days for admission to the hospital. You and your child's teachers need to make sure there are no penalties for these absences. Teachers and other staff at the school are usually more understanding if you tell them as soon as possible. Tell teachers when your child will be out of school and for how long.

Students are truant when they miss school or classes without a valid excuse. You can avoid truancy court problems or lowered grades by giving a valid document to the school's attendance clerk. A note from your child's doctor or the hospital is acceptable.

How do I help my child return to school?

A plan for your child's return to school (called a reintegration plan) and a plan to help with your child's special needs (called classroom accommodation) have to be planned ahead. You plan these your child's doctors and teachers. Careful planning can help make the transition from hospital to school more successful.

Elementary school children often have less trouble reintegrating. Smaller classes help school staff and classmates to be enthusiastic and more understanding. At the middle school level or higher, staff and friends may not know about your child's medical issues. The school staff needs to understand how health issues will affect attendance and performance. Review your junior and senior high school student's medical information and suggested activity restrictions with counselors, teachers, and the school nurse.

What about my teen with chronic illness?

Academics are not the only difficult task that teenagers with chronic illness face at school. Students in junior and senior high school are expected to take care of their own medical needs at school and to work with school personnel to plan accommodations. This is harder if you have to arrange accommodations with each teacher. It is better to make a single plan for all classes.

How do I plan for my child's special health related needs at school?

Your child may need extra help for personal physical cares in regular education classes or in special education classes. A written **Individualized Health Care Plan** identifies your child's specific health needs and the health care actions scheduled during school. This is developed by the school nurse, your family, and the school team. Examples

of accommodations that your child may need are: time during the school day to rest or take medications, unlimited access to the rest room, or a shorter school day. It is important that you help educate the school personnel about your child's specific needs.

Some students qualify for other accommodations in their classrooms such as larger print worksheets. A written plan for such accommodations in regular education is called a **"504" Plan**. A written plan for special education services is called an **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** for health related reasons. You may request an evaluation of your child for special services with your child's teacher, school counselor, or principal.

To decide services, school personnel complete an assessment and a thorough review of your child's medical, developmental, and school history. You are an important part of the team. You should be ready to present information about your child's medical condition and physical abilities. When the assessment is complete, the school personnel, including the classroom teacher, will meet with you to discuss services.

You may also put a plan in place to cover emergency medical needs at school. Place emergency phone numbers for you and your child's doctors on file at the school.

What do I do about medicines at school?

Your child may need medicines, snacks, or treatments at school. Share the instructions from the medical team with school personnel. Include this information on your child's **Individualized Health Care Plan.**

You can make plans for your child to store supplies at school. Most schools will not allow students to give themselves medicine at school, however, they will arrange for the school nurse or other trained personnel to give medicine to your child. Teach your child to check the medicine dosage each time before taking it. Students should remind school personnel when medicines or treatments are late. Schools are busy places, and it is possible that doses or treatments could be accidentally overlooked.

Ask medical caregivers to help update your child's student health care forms every year or when medical needs change. If your child's medicines change, the school must have a written order to change the medicine. School personnel can let you know if your child's performance changes when the medicine changes.

What about fatigue and endurance?

A student may tire more easily after returning to school following an absence. Long school days can be difficult. It is not always necessary or the best thing for your child to go home when she is tired. It might be better to schedule rest breaks or shorter school days.

Your child should participate in physical activities as much as possible, determined by medical personnel and parents. Consider supervision for playground activities and crowded school areas. Provide the school with written recommendations from your doctor.

What kind of records should I keep for my child?

Be prepared to give medical and school professionals information about your child when you meet with them. Keep a copy of completed forms and letters. You can prepare a binder with important information to take to medical and school appointments.

What should we tell the other children at my child's school?

Other students may have heard rumors or do not understand your child's illness. You can prepare classmates before your child returns to school to reduce fears and increase acceptance. The other students may have questions about where their friend has been or what they can do to help. Teachers can only give information to classmates with your permission.

You or someone from the hospital or doctor's office could visit your child's classroom before she returns to give them information, and answer questions. Social Workers or Child Life Specialists can help you explain complicated medical information in a way that children understand. Classmates often want to know if there is a "name for it," "how you get it," and if "they can catch it". The information you give classmates should be brief and right for their age and development. You can tell classmates how they can be helpful to your child. This encourages positive relations. If you are going to talk to your child's classmates, arrange in advance with the teacher.

What if my child leaves the hospital, but cannot return to school?

If your child leaves the hospital, but cannot return to school, you may ask for homebound or home-hospital services. Request these with the school or district so your child does not fall behind. A doctor or the hospital education specialist, with parent's written permission, may contact school personnel to start the process.

Each school district has rules about how long a student must be out of school before they begin homebound services. Homebound services provide some teaching time at home, but less than in the classroom. A teacher brings work to the student, briefly reviews material, collects homework, and assigns homework for the next meeting.

What if my child is an infant or very young?

Infants and young children under the age of three with special health care needs may receive community-based services from state early intervention programs. Children ages 3-5 may qualify for services from local school districts. These services help with language development, physical and cognitive (thinking) skills, social skills, and adaptive strategies. Learning skills early will help your child be ready for kindergarten.

For more information, contact:

- **School Services**
  Primary Children's Hospital
  100 North Mario Cappechi Drive
  Salt Lake City, Utah 84113
  801.662.4914
- **Medical Home Website**
  (Information and forms for medical providers and families)
  http:medhome.med.utah.edu
- **Your child's school or school district office**

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Pediatric Education Services, 801.662.3500 | Rev. 09/12, LTA520408012 | *Available in Spanish*