

# Children and Young People's Nursing: a Philosophy of Care

RCN guidance for nursing staff

CLINICAL PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE



# Acknowledgements

The RCN would like to thank current and former members of Children and Young People's (CYP) Forums for reviewing and updating this publication since its first publication in 1991:

This update has been undertaken by the RCN Children and Young People's Professional Issues Forum. The principles and commitments set out in this document form the basis of all RCN policies relating to the care of children and young people.

The term 'child' refers to any individual from birth through infancy (including neonates), childhood and adolescence, recognising the particular needs of specific ages, particularly the transition period to adulthood. The term 'family' refers to the child's or young person's significant carer(s), as defined by the individual and/or their parent(s)/carer(s)/legal guardian(s).

This publication is due for review in December 2024. To provide feedback on its contents or on your experience of using the publication, please email:

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# Introduction

Encompassing a range of communities and networks, the RCN Children and Young People's Forums are:

- a focus for RCN members interested in the nursing of children and young people, providing them with networks and opportunities for support, advice and professional development
- a voice for children and young people's nursing within the RCN, and for nursing within the world of child health
- a means of developing the art and science of children and young people's nursing and its specialties.

Children and young people's nursing practice is underpinned by beliefs that are based upon the nature of the child or young person, and their status and rights within both the family and society. The RCN Children and Young People's Forums believe that the primary focus of registered nurses is to assist the child or young person and their family to prevent or manage the physiological, physical, social, psychological and spiritual effects of a health problem or condition and its treatment (RCN, 2017).

There is a recognition of the variation in the composition of families and some children and young people may be within the care of Local Authorities receiving Corporate Parenting.

Depending on the nursing context, the role of the Children and Young People's (CYP) nurse may encompass:

- the promotion of health and wellbeing, including mental health and emotional wellbeing
- the assessment and recognition of altering health status, planning and managing the care of the child and family, and evaluating the care given
- supporting the child and young person to reach their full potential
- educating and informing the child, their family and teams involved in the child's life and care
- undertaking an advocacy role and, or creating conditions in which the child and, or family is empowered
- providing care and support to the child and their family within the child's own home, school or other care setting, for example, Short Break facility or centre
- providing palliative or end of life care.

# The needs of the child or young person as an individual

While recognising the individual needs of each child or young person, the RCN Children and Young People's Forums:

- acknowledge the impact of inequalities in current health service and social care provision and the effect of the inter-relationships between social, physical, economic and political environmental factors upon the health and wellbeing of children and young people (Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2020)
- promote the recognition of the distinct needs of children and young people across all health care settings both within their own homes and any environment where children may be cared for outside of their family. This includes access to services tailored to meet the changing needs of children as they grow up; opportunities to maintain their education; health promotion; and safeguarding and collaborative working between service planners, commissioners of services, health service providers, social care and education. The aim is to help ensure seamless, safe, effective child-centred care, particularly during the transition from child to adult service provision.

Registered nurses caring for children and young people in any setting should:

- listen to children and young people, providing a means for them to convey their opinions and feelings, using alternative formats of communication where required, for example, Sign language, Augmented communication. Use the communications to guide decisions about the way health and nursing care is delivered
- promote and protect the individual rights of children and young people in all settings, including care systems, secure estate and custody settings, where children and young people may receive care and treatment, this includes being cared for in a culturally sensitive environment, protect privacy and confidentiality during all episodes of care (United Nations, 1989; European Parliament, 1986; RCN, 2015)
- recognise each child or young person as a unique individual whose best interests must be paramount, while considering their physical, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual needs, as well as those of their families
- respect the right of children, according to their age and understanding, to access appropriate information, facilitating informed participation in decisions about their health care and assisting them to develop independence.

# The child or young person within their family

In caring for children and young people, registered nurses should:

- recognise and use the knowledge and caring experience of parents or carers in all aspects of their child's health care
- facilitate a reciprocal relationship with the family within which children, young people and families are able to determine the level of participation they desire at any one time unless, in exceptional circumstances, this is not in the best interests of the child or young person
- recognise and respect differences within and between families in the amount they wish or are able to be involved in their child's care, while ensuring that effective health care is fully negotiated with the child or young person and their family
- promote the rights of children and young people to be accompanied by a familiar and trusted person – usually parents or carers – in any environment where care is delivered
- ensure sufficient information, education and support is provided to promote and enable active participation and consultation with children, young people and their families and carers in all aspects of health care provision and decision making, and to ensure that their decisions are respected and whenever possible acted upon (DH, 2012)
- inform the child or young person and their family of the different roles and responsibilities of members of the health care team and, in complex care cases, the wider professional network and the team around the child
- seek meaningful feedback, suggestions and views via appropriate methods and methodologies to develop policies collaboratively with children, young people, parents and carers (The Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Inquiry, 2013)
- ensure procedures for managing complaints are child-friendly, clearly communicated and regularly updated
- respect and value cultural, spiritual, religious, gender and other diversities within and between family groups.

# Nursing services for children, young people and their families

The RCN Children and Young People's Forums:

- endorse the need for a named professional, who has children and young people's health service experience and expertise, to be responsible for commissioning services at local level. Further, we support the Kennedy recommendations (Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry, 2001) for a lead executive on every policymaking body; the latter person should have a remit for overseeing the strategic development of services for children, with responsibility to implement the principles outlined in this philosophy
- support the work of the children's commissioners responsible for children and young people in each of the UK countries
- campaign for the accessibility and equity of health care provision for all children and young people, and the implementation of national standards to meet their specific needs
- support the view that the child's or young person's needs should be paramount in the development of services, rather than professional roles or boundaries
- promote the provision of services that are child and young person-orientated; facilities should be designed to meet the specific needs of children and young people and they should be involved in the planning and development of future services
- campaign for the collection of national and local data on health care interventions and outcomes to guide future children and young people's health care service provision; this should incorporate the views of children, young people, parents and professionals (Department of Health, 2012)
- embrace the development of comprehensive, integrated, multi-agency child health services to provide seamless care across organisational boundaries (Kings Fund, 2017)
- promote collaborative and integrated working between services for children, young people and adults to ensure a smooth transition between health care providers
- assert the right of children and young people in all settings to be cared for by appropriately qualified and registered nursing staff, who have received specific training to meet Children and young people's needs. The levels and skill-mix of staff should reflect the specific needs of children and young people and their families, with access as required to specialist and advanced children's nurse practitioners to provide specific, enhanced care, advice, education and support
- maintain that the environment of care should reflect the psychosocial and developmental needs of children and young people in terms of play, recreational facilities and educational provision. There should be specific provision for children and young people with additional and complex health needs and disabilities. Appropriate care and provision available for children and young people with acute clinical and critical care needs and for those requiring palliative and end of life care

- promote the role of children's nurses across all settings, including primary care organisations. Children's nurses should work alongside children and young people's public health nurses, including school nurses, health visitors and community children's nurses. The provision of a comprehensive community health care service, to help reduce unnecessary inpatient admissions and hospital attendance
- focus on health promotion to minimise lifestyle factors and risk-taking behaviour that may compromise the health and wellbeing of children and young people. This includes the impact of social media and its influence on children and young people (RCN, 2019)
- reinforce the role of all registered nurses in safeguarding and protecting children and young people who may themselves become vulnerable adults.



# Developing and maintaining clinical competence

The RCN Children and Young People's Forums:

- believe that registered nurses have a right to be supported and should be able to access professional leadership and clinical supervision at local level. Safeguarding supervision is mandatory to enable registered nurses recognise safeguarding issues and to help protect children effectively
- advocates that registered nurses should receive the appropriate education to undertake their role in providing holistic care for children, young people and their families across a range of settings and services (NMC, 2018)
- encourage effective communication to share and develop the evidence base for practice
- offer registered nurses access to the range of knowledge and skills needed to work in dynamic health services
- promote the need for continuing professional development for revalidation with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC, 2018) and specific post-registration education and training opportunities for nurses working with children and young people; This includes specific provision regarding the safeguarding of children and young people
- enhance reciprocal exchanges and joint education, both within the RCN and other relevant professional bodies, to ensure there is a broad perspective in all aspects of work.

# Supporting evidence and information

Governments, professional and voluntary bodies have produced a wealth of policy statements, reports and recommendations about children and young people's health services. The RCN Children and Young People's Forums strive to continuously influence and shape policy development, while also lobbying for the full implementation of guidance recommendations.

Key documents which are endorsed or fully supported by the RCN Children and Young People's Forums include:

- Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland (2011) *Day case and short stay surgery*
- Royal College of Anaesthetists (2020) *Guidelines for the provision of anaesthetic services: paediatric anaesthesia services*
- The Department of Health Guidance document *Welfare of Children and Young People in Hospital* (1991)
- Children and Young People's Health Outcomes Forum (2012) *Children and young people's health outcomes strategy: report of the Children and Young People's Health Outcomes Forum*
- Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Securing better health for children and young people through world class commissioning*
- Department for Education (2003) *Every child matters*
- Department of Health (2008) *Better care: better lives: improving outcomes and experience for children, young people and their families living with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions*
- Department of Health and Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) *Healthy lives, brighter futures*
- Department of Health (2009) *Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked after children – revised statutory guidance*
- Department of Health (2011) *NHS at home: community children's nursing services*
- Department of Health (2012) *Getting it right for children, young people and families: maximising the contribution of the school nursing team: vision and call to action*
- Kennedy I (2010) *Getting it right for children and young people: overcoming cultural barriers in the NHS so as to meet their needs*
- Paediatric Intensive Care Society (2015) *Standards for the care of critically ill children* (4th edition)
- Scottish Government (2012) *Framework for the delivery of palliative care to children and young people in Scotland*

The RCN fully supports those members who seek to raise concerns about the care of children and young people or the protection of their rights. For specific advice, please contact RCN Direct on 0345 772 6100 or your local RCN office.

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### Publication

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### Description

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