



SEPSIS
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Using Visual and Text Guides When Talking to Patients with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Working with children who have intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs) can be challenging. Some can function fairly independently with only a bit of help. Others need considerable or full support. Regardless of their ability, children with an IDD – and their parents or guardians – require special consideration and guidance if they are sick or admitted to the hospital, especially for serious illnesses like sepsis or septic shock.

Sepsis Alliance created two guides, one visual and one more text-based, to help healthcare professionals when they work with this special population and their parents or guardians.

Choose the most appropriate one for your patient.

The text-based guide uses basic language to explain how infections occur, the importance of hand washing and vaccines, what to do if they feel sick, and more.

The visual guide relies more on photos, as well as images of Bug, a friendly ladybug who helps children learn about infection prevention. This guide can help your patients visualize things, such as what they might see in a hospital room or intensive care unit. It was created so you can use only one page if desired instead of the whole guide.

These guides can help provide a sense of control in an often frightening situation. They can help children better understand what is going on around them. The words and photos can be a starting point for you to discuss how they feel, what they need to know, and how you will help them.

Here are some tips that may be helpful when working with children with an IDD, especially if they are admitted to the hospital for sepsis or septic shock:

- Ask the parent or guardian how the child understands and learns best.
- Speak directly to the child (when possible), even if their parents or guardians are in the room.
- Take off your white coat if you wear one, to help make the child feel more comfortable.
- Speak clearly and slowly, avoiding jargon. Take pauses so as not to overwhelm.
- If the child can, ask them to repeat instructions or things you want them to remember.
- Try to have conversations in a private, quiet area, free of distractions.
- Keep sentences short and with one topic at a time.
- If the child uses a communication tool, such as a picture board, sign language, or a phone app, ask the parents or guardians to show you how to use it.
- Allow the child to have a comfort tool/favorite item if they want it.

Learn more about sepsis, and access resources, at [Sepsis.org](https://www.sepsis.org).

Access a clinical education course about sepsis and caring for patients with IDD at [SepsisInstitute.org](https://www.sepsisinstitute.org)

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