

Survey: Parents should be allowed to be present during trauma care

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A mother looks on as the pediatric trauma team at Orlando Health Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children cares for her son. A new survey shows that 90 percent of Americans think parents should be able to stay with their child rather than being confined to a waiting room. Credit: Orlando Health Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children

Hospitals that adopt a policy allowing parents in trauma room are seeing

the benefits

Orlando, Fla - When a seriously injured [child](#) arrives at the [trauma](#) center at Orlando Health Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children, the patient's parents are ushered into the trauma [room](#) alongside the medical team. The policy to allow parents to be present during care is not the norm among pediatric trauma centers, but a new national survey by Orlando Health shows that the vast majority of people think it should be. The survey found 90 percent agree that parents should be able to stay with their child during treatment for a life-threatening injury or condition.

"Many hospitals are hesitant to allow parents in the trauma room because medical personnel worry they'll be a distraction, but those who have changed their policy have found that not only do parents do just fine in those difficult situations, but their presence is actually very valuable," said Donald Plumley, MD, a pediatric surgeon and medical director for pediatric trauma at Arnold Palmer Hospital. "Parents help guide our critical care decisions by providing information on their child such as allergies, medical history and details on their injury or condition."

Plumley said parents are also able to help keep patients calm, which oftentimes allows the trauma team to forgo sedation or administer less pain medication.

At Arnold Palmer Hospital, parents are accompanied by a dedicated staff member who is there to support them and keep them informed. "While I'm taking care of the child, a chaplain or social worker is taking care of the family and explaining what's happening every step of the way," said Plumley. "It's a partnership that has allowed us to seamlessly integrate parents into trauma procedures."

Traditionally, parents are asked to stay in a separate waiting area, which

can add to their anxiety about their child's status. Plumley says it's extremely rare for a parent to choose to wait outside when given the option. "It's very difficult for a parent to watch their child go through an emergency medical situation, but about 95 percent opt to be in the room," he said. "It's much harder for them to be in a waiting area knowing that their child is scared or in pain and not knowing anything about their condition or what is being done to treat them."



When 10-year-old Jonah Downs broke his leg, his parents were able to stay with him as he was treated in the trauma center. They said it eased Jonah's anxiety and helped them stay informed. Credit: Orlando Health Arnold Palmer Hospital.

Lynette Ancona and Brent Downs experienced this firsthand after they received a phone call that their 10-year-old son, Jonah, had an accident

on the school playground and was rushed to the [hospital](#) in an ambulance.

"We had very little information when we arrived, but we were able to follow Jonah into the trauma room," said Downs. "The doctor told us exactly what was happening as they took images of Jonah's broken leg and told us that he would have to have surgery."

Jonah's mom says seeing the expertise of everyone in the room helped to put her at ease. "Every single medical professional we came in contact with in that room was doing everything they could to help him, and we weren't excluded from anything," Ancona said. "Seeing the care that he was receiving really helped my confidence level go up."

Plumley says over the past several years of developing the process, parents have become an integral part of trauma care, and he hopes that more hospitals will benefit from including them. "We now feel that parents are part of the team," said Plumley. "When a patient comes in, it's like a well-oiled machine. Every person on the medical staff has their place and their tasks, and that now includes the [parents](#) to the point that I look for their input when treating a patient."

Provided by Orlando Health Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children

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