

Training 4 – Basic Interaction Skills for Volunteers

[PowerPoint](#) || [Video](#)

Objectives for Meeting:

Your volunteers will be able to:

1. Be able to engage a child in a meaningful conversation as their character
2. Understand the “nevers” of interacting with children
3. Understand the “dos and don’ts” of taking and posting photos with children
4. Apply the proper procedure for initiating physical contact with a child

Preparing for the meeting: *Review the training and be prepared to present subsequent material. Select an ice breaker. Print an appropriate amount of handouts.*

- I. **Welcome and Ice Breaker** - Begin by welcoming all of your volunteers to the meeting and describe the type of training they will be working on this week. Pick an ice-breaker of your choosing. Make a point to discuss this week’s focus on both working with children, and the expected behavior on visits. Encourage them to ask questions if they are confused or feel like they need more information. This is a crucial training session, and you want your volunteers to be as prepared as possible.
- II. **Play Training Video**
- III. **Be able to engage a child in a meaningful conversation as their character**
 - A. Today we will be learning how to interact with children in a hospital setting as well as the expected behavior on visits. We will cover everything from conversation starters, physical contact, as well as topics to avoid. We will also go over A Moment of Magic’s rules and regulations for all volunteers on any visits. If you have any questions along the way feel free to stop and ask. We want each of you to be as prepared as possible for your first, and every visit after.
 - B. Starting or initiating conversation can be one of the biggest obstacles a new character may face. You may want to write the following key points down:
 1. When approaching a child, move toward them slowly and quietly. Some children need more time to accept strangers and may need to make the first move. Next, introduce yourself to the child as your character. Ask if they have seen your movie.
 2. When speaking to children, stoop or sit at their level. Don’t be afraid to sit on the ground if need be. Listen actively and with respect.
 3. Make sure to use language on the child’s developmental level.
 4. You might panic. Here, it is important that you take a mindful approach. A mindful approach would be to suggest tuning in to the breath for some moments, breathing deep calm breath or bringing the awareness to the feet, feeling the contact between the feet and the ground. Another thing would be to silently say something kind to oneself like “It is ok, this is just an emotion, I am here for myself, everything is fine etc”.
 5. Take note of the small details, try to remember the child’s name and be prepared to have a one-sided conversation.

Activity: Watch [this video](#). Have volunteers count how many times the character changes the subject or initiates another subject. Be prepared for kids to answer with “yea” “okay”, etc.

- IV. **Understand the “nevers” of interacting with children**

- A. Another important aspect is what topics to avoid when having a conversation with a child. While it is important to know how to start and continue a conversation with a child, there are certain topics you must avoid when interacting with each child.
- B. Never ask a child about their illness. You never want to ask a child why they are in the hospital. We are there to remove them from their situation if only for a few moments. We want to focus on the child, not their illness. Do not ask questions like “How are you feeling/doing?” or “What’s that [a medical device] for?”
- C. Do not promise anything you are not absolutely sure will happen. You do not want to put yourself in a situation where you will have to disappoint a child. Don’t say “feel better” or “get well soon” because we, unfortunately, don’t know if they will get better or feel well soon.
- D. Do not offer medical advice.
- E. It is important to only touch a child once you have asked. Sometimes children will run into your arms and hug you and other times they will hide behind their parents. It’s imperative to allow the child to come to you. For children that are nonverbal and in order to respect certain religions, it’s best to allow the child to come to you or to get direct permission from the child. You could also use the stairwell method approach: Start out small and ask a child for a high five. If they feel comfortable at doing that, only then ask for a hug. If a child is nonverbal, it's better to check with a parent or guardian with how a child feels about physical touch. You can never be too careful about a child’s comfort level. And if a child doesn’t want a hug, or seems uninterested, don’t take it personally! We always want to make sure the child is comfortable and happy with interacting with us. The child sets the tone for the whole visit.

Handout - List of conversation starters

- V. **Understand the “dos and don’ts” of taking and posting photos with children**
 - A. One of the most rewarding parts of becoming a character is the wonderful connections you will make with a child. However, there are some tips and rules we have to follow when working with children.
 - B. Only post photos that the hospital directly approves, the parent approves, and headquarters approves. All hospitals should be given our photo waiver consents prior to a visit to distribute and collect from patients’ families, and all photos must be submitted to the foundation headquarters for approval before being posted.
 - C. Photos without a consent form cannot be posted.
 - D. Never mention a child’s age, location, or illness in the post. Only use the child’s first name if the parent has given you direct permission to do so.

Activity: Have volunteers pull out the below list on strips of paper and act them out in groups of five, designate one person as a child, one as a parent, one as the Magic Maker, and two as characters. If virtual, utilize breakout rooms.

- VI. **Off-Campus Quiz** - Hand out copies of the quiz found on the following page. Collect and grade after the meeting. Any volunteer that fails the quiz must meet with the Intrachapter Relations chair to go over any mistakes, then they can retake the quiz after the next meeting. The volunteer is not permitted to go on visits until they pass the test.
- VII. **Executive Board Updates** - Have each Executive Board member discuss what they have been up to. Each week, members should say what they’ve been planning and what they need help with. Not every member will need to report each week.