

Visitation Ministry Guidelines

Littleton Bible Chapel (revision Oct. 2010)

All Christians share the responsibility and privilege to bear each other up in crisis situations. “If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it.” (1 Cor. 12:26). The following suggestions are made to encourage and offer support to our brothers and sisters in Christ who are hospitalized, homebound, new moms, or otherwise in need of special encouragement.

GENERAL VISITATION GUIDELINES

1. **Pray** before you go. Ask the Lord to use you in a significant way.
2. Be sensitive to the specific needs of the individual. Let their needs and wishes guide your visit, not your agenda.
3. Try to go with another person, if at all possible.
4. Never visit someone of the opposite sex without taking a friend with you.
5. You are representing the church – dress modestly.
6. Keep visits short AND frequent. Fifteen to thirty minutes is a good rule of thumb. Don’t make promises of future visits if you can’t follow through; it will disappoint them.
7. Minister through Scripture reading. Ask them if you can read a favorite scripture, but be prepared with one of your own.
8. Be optimistic and cheerful in your discussion. Humor is good medicine. Be yourself. Share what is happening at church.
 - **Remember to be a sensitive listener.** Be understanding of the individual’s mood, disposition, and stages of the illness or crisis – denial, fear, anger, and acceptance.
 - **Let the individual talk.** Never bring your own problems into the discussion.
9. Keep body language comfortable and relaxed. Pull your chair close to the one you are visiting.
10. Never talk about their personal or financial matters unless the information is volunteered.
11. Offer to perform any helpful services for the individual. (Examples: Write a letter, make a phone call [or just dial a number], answer phone calls and questions, run an errand, help with a meal, make them comfortable, look after children, pets, mail, newspapers, water plants, etc.)
12. If the discussion starts to get “out of your league,” admit it and suggest that they talk with a pastor-elder.
13. **Pray** together before you leave. If you feel comfortable, pray with the individual for healing, recovery, or encouragement. Above all, help them see that they are in the presence of the Great Physician and Comforter at all times

Home Visitation Hints:

1. Call ahead to arrange a convenient time.
2. Don't feel obligated to bring gifts. They may feel obligated (in the midst of their crisis) to send you a thank-you note. The visit is enough encouragement.
3. A good way to get someone to open up is to ask about pictures, etc. that you see around the home.
4. If they are interested and/or able, share an activity. (Examples: movie, TV sports event, play games, bring over pizza or other treat.)
5. If you observe a need for additional home support (meals, cleaning, child care, etc.), or counseling, please contact the church pastor-elders or deacons.

HOSPITAL VISITATION ETIQUETTE

Be careful to observe the hospital rules:

- Always visit during regularly scheduled hours.
- Don't bring any food or candy. The patient may have dietary restrictions.
- **Follow regulations concerning cell phone use, latex balloons, etc.
- Intensive care units do not allow cut flowers.
- Intensive care units allow only immediate family or a church elder [with the family's consent] and visits are usually limited to five minutes.
- Be aware that HIPPA regulations restrict what information the hospital can share with non-family members

Appropriate gifts:

- Small floral arrangements or house plants
- Books, magazines, books on tape, music tapes, or CD's
- Games, posters, or other items of interest to the patient

Visit without children.

Do not visit if you are sick or have an infection. Call or write the patient instead.

Avoid sitting on the bed or otherwise disturbing the patient. Such activities could cause great pain or discomfort.

Talk TO the person, not ABOUT them.

Be aware that patients can often hear conversations in the room, even if they appear otherwise. They can often respond with a blink, nod, or squeeze of the hand.

Be sensitive to the need for human touch:

Don't be afraid to hold a hand, touch a shoulder or give a hug (if you feel comfortable, if it is appropriate to the situation, and if it will not cause pain or discomfort to the patient).

Never criticize the doctor, his orders, or the hospital care:

If you think you see a serious problem, discuss it with the nursing supervisor or patient's doctor in private.

Don't hinder the hospital staff or doctor:

If you are visiting when the patient needs attention or the doctor arrives, step outside the room and give them unlimited time alone.

Try to avoid unnecessary talk about the illness:

Don't be afraid of lulls in the conversation. Talking may tire the patient. Just sit quietly beside the bed. Be ready to listen.

Remember...

Sympathy and compassion are the keys to effective visitation. If God puts it on your heart to visit a brother or sister in need – GO! Expect God to work through you to bring them comfort and encouragement.