

# Family Presence

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## Why Family Presence Matters

At Alberta Health Services, designated family/support persons are important partners in patient care. These are individuals that a patient identifies as an essential support and who they want included in planning and decision making around their care.

When family/support persons are present, they provide invaluable assistance to ensure a patient is comfortable, supported and their needs are being met. They are also an important source of information about the patient's health history, preferences and care needs.

Receiving healthcare is often a source of significant stress for patients and their family/support persons. This document highlights ways healthcare providers and care teams can ensure family/support persons are welcomed, appreciated and remain a key partner in care.

## Introductions and welcome

Patients are encouraged to identify **at least two** designated family/support persons who need to be documented on their chart. When you first interact with family/support persons:

- Start by sharing your name, your role and what you are there to do.
- Ask for their name, relationship to the patient and the support they provide.
- Let them know they are welcome to be there at any time based on patient preference. There are no "visiting hours" for family/support persons.
- Thank them for being there. Kindness often fosters kindness in return.

## Invite family/support persons to be partners

Family/support persons have a lifetime of experience with the patient. By inviting them to be a partner, you are contributing to increasing patient safety and improving the patient and family experience.

- Seek their advice on patient preferences and behaviours.
- Ask them about their observations on changes in the patient's health status
- Invite them to be ally for identifying potential safety concerns.

## Comfort

Family/support persons may be hungry, thirsty, exhausted and needing to use the bathroom, as they are often putting the patient's needs ahead of their own.

- Ensure they know the locations of washrooms, cafeterias and quiet spaces.
- Offer a pillow, blanket and the most comfortable chair you can.
- Invite them to take breaks to take care of their personal needs.

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## Discuss involvement

Family/support persons are present because they care about the patient, and often want to help, but they may be unsure how they can help and may be afraid to ask.

- Take the time up front to discuss with the patient and their family/support persons how they want to participate (e.g., feeding, personal care, mobilizing, care and discharge discussions.)
- Ensure family/support persons are oriented and enabled to support care when it is safe, and that they are aware of activities where they should seek help.

## For more information

Visit our [Family Presence Policy Suite](#) website to learn more about Family Presence at AHS or email at us at [patient.engagement@ahs.ca](mailto:patient.engagement@ahs.ca).