



How to Talk to Parents and Caregivers About Congenital Cardiac Care for Children with Heart Defects

Children with congenital heart defects need to see a pediatric cardiologist regularly. As an emergency room physician, you can help make sure they do.

Specifically, it's important to tell parents and caregivers why children need to see a pediatric cardiologist and refer children who aren't seeing one to the care they need. When you do, your impact can last long beyond their visit to the emergency room!

Use these talking points to help start the conversation.

1 Find out if pediatric patients have heart defects



“Has your child ever had any heart problems? For example, did they ever have heart surgery or take medicine for their heart? If they did, I want to make sure they get the care they need to stay healthy.”

It's important to ask if children have a history of heart problems. This is especially true for children with signs or symptoms that could indicate a congenital heart defect — like trouble breathing, chest pain, or a chest scar. When you learn that a child has a heart defect, ask their parent or caregiver if the child is seeing a pediatric cardiologist.

2 Explain why children with heart defects need to see a pediatric cardiologist



“Heart defects are a lifelong condition, even after heart surgery. Heart defects can also lead to complications over time — but they may not cause symptoms right away. That’s why children with heart defects need to see a pediatric cardiologist regularly.”

Parents and caregivers may not realize their child needs to continue to see a pediatric cardiologist — especially if the child has been feeling healthy. Explain that symptoms can develop over time and that pediatric cardiologists can catch problems early to help make sure children stay healthy.

3 Describe what a pediatric cardiologist does



“A pediatric cardiologist is a doctor who’s trained to treat heart problems in children. They know how to tell if a heart problem is getting worse and how to help children with heart defects stay healthy.”

Some parents and caregivers may not understand why children with heart defects need to see a specialist, so it’s important to explain what a pediatric cardiologist does. Emphasize that pediatric cardiologists know more about heart defects in children than anyone else — including which medicines or procedures children may need.

4 Tell parents and caregivers you can make a referral



“I can refer your child to a pediatric cardiologist to make sure they’re getting the care they need.”

Navigating the health care system can be overwhelming and stressful for patients and their families — so reassure them that they’re not alone. Tell them you can help them find a pediatric cardiologist.

To learn more, check out:

- aap.org/CHDcare
- cdc.gov/heartdefects
- chphc.org

