

Overview of Sikh faith – Quicksheet for ward inductions

Sikhism was founded in the 16th century in the Punjab district of what is now India and Pakistan. It was founded by Guru Nanak and is based on his teachings, and those of the 9 Sikh gurus who followed him. The most important thing in Sikhism is the internal religious state of the individual. Sikhism is a monotheistic religion, meaning there is a belief in one God. Sikhism stresses the importance of doing good actions rather than merely carrying out rituals. Sikhs believe that the way to lead a good life is to: keep God in heart and mind at all times; live honestly and work hard; treat everyone equally; be generous to the less fortunate and serve others.

The Sikh place of worship is called a Gurdwara. The Sikh scripture is the Guru Granth Sahib, a book that Sikhs consider a living Guru. The tenth Sikh Guru decreed that after his death the spiritual guide of the Sikhs would be the teachings contained in that book, so the Guru Granth Sahib now has the status of a Guru, and Sikhs show it the respect they would give to a human Guru.

The 5 Ks are 5 physical symbols worn by Sikhs who have been initiated by baptism into the Khalsa (Sikh brotherhood). The 5 Ks taken together symbolise that the Sikh who wears them has dedicated themselves to a life of devotion and submission to the Guru. The five Ks are:

- Kesh (uncut hair)
- Kara (a steel bracelet)
- Kanga (a wooden comb)
- Kaccha - also spelt, Kachh, Kachera (cotton underwear)
- Kirpan (steel sword)

Children in Sikhism

Children will be 'baptised' into the Sikh faith at whatever age it is deemed that the child understands the obligations of Sikhism. Children being brought up in a devout Sikh family may be baptised earlier than others. Children sometimes will take the decision to be baptised themselves when they feel it is time.

Religious, Spiritual and Cultural needs: Simran prayers are said, by family, Chaplain or local faith leaders. These can be chanted all the time, as it brings comfort. Gurbani hymns from Guru Granth Sahib (Holy book).

Visitors: Closest family will be around all of the time. Wider relatives and friends may visit; family will invite or discourage visit depending on health of child. It is possible that there will be large numbers of visitors from all over the UK and possibly overseas.

Food and diet: Halal food (a Muslim was of preparing food) is forbidden. Ask the family if the patient eats fish, meat, and eggs. Vegetarian may or may not include eggs.

Treatment /medication: Sikhs are generally very open to medical treatment. If they are a strict vegetarian, alternatives to medication that contains any animal products (e.g. gelatin as the capsule shell) would be appreciated (e.g. a liquid form of the same medication). Blood transfusions are permitted.

Personal hygiene: Keep 5 k's on/intact at all times. (bangle, cotton underwear, small harmless knife, wooden comb, uncut hair)

Clothing and modesty: Mature teenagers, especially girls, will be more sensitive to modesty and same gender care. Family will be more concerned for modesty of girls, and may wish to be present if same gender care cannot be provided.

Birth rituals: Soon after birth, prayers are offered in the Gurdwara for long and healthy Sikh way of life for the baby. Baby may not be named for several days as the name is obtained from the Sikh holy scriptures. A naming ceremony usually takes place in the Gurdwara if mother and baby are well enough – alternatively a side room on the ward could be used.

Life support: permitted. Decision still needs to be made according to family's wishes, and they would appreciate being told realities of recovery and quality of life before making the decision.

Organ donation and post mortem: Permitted

Golden rule, Communication is very important. Ensure that they are involved in decision making – families may feel they have to sit wait for staff to make decisions: invite them to offer wishes and input, especially on decision making.

Paediatric Palliative Care Pathway for the Sikh Child

Interpreter: Most likely to be needed, Punjabi language. Child may speak good English but family may not. Language barrier is a key consideration.

Visit from religious leader: Not a requirement, family may make a request for the Sikh Chaplain. Extended family may need to know.

Breaking bad news

Identify main decision makers and key family members. Family may not wish child to know. Make sure family fully understand what is happening with child's health and what happens next. Make sure family support are around when breaking news.

Conducive environment & visual space:

Sometimes images of the Ten Gurus, or Guru Nanak (1st) and Guru Gobind Singh (10th) may be used as sources of comfort. Common practice to have picture of Guru in home. Ritual of Darshan – to “see the Guru”.

Same gender care: no preferences for child.
Modesty and clothing: Mature teenagers, especially girls, will be more sensitive to modesty and same gender care. Family will be more concerned for modesty of girls, and may wish to be present if same gender care cannot be provided.

Personal hygiene: Keep 5 k's on/intact at all times. (bangle, cotton underwear, small harmless knife, wooden comb, uncut hair)

Diet and food: Halal food (a Muslim was of preparing food) is forbidden. Ask family if child eats fish, meat, and eggs. Vegetarian may or may not include eggs. Family may bring food from home.

Belief about suffering, Death and Dying:

Suffering and death is God's will, and therefore no one's fault. Sikhs believe that whosoever is born has eventually to die. The physical body is perishable, but the soul is eternal. The soul is a part of God and it yearns reunion with God. Liberation from the cycle of birth and death, from millions of life forms (reincarnation), is the basis of the Sikh understanding of the purpose of life. Human life is the gift of the Divine, and its termination, a return to the Divine source. Some people will have an understanding of karma, of the effect of doing good deeds and bad deeds. However there *may* be an understanding that for a child this may not be relevant, as a child is too innocent to do bad deeds.

Religious and spiritual needs

During times of sickness and disease, Sikhs pray to seek God's help, remember Waheguru (God's name) to obtain peace, ask for forgiveness, and recite or listen to Gurbani, the sacred hymns. The sacred hymns and prayers provide them with physical and spiritual strength and nourishment. Simran prayers are said, by family, Chaplain or local faith leaders. These can be chanted all the time, as it brings comfort.

Respect the 5k's on the body, and any head covering.

Do not interrupt praying patients/families.

Consult the parents prior to shaving or removing hair from any part of the patient's body. This applies to both male and female patients.

Life Support: permitted. Decision still needs to be made according to family's wishes, and they would appreciate being told realities of recovery and quality of life before making the decision. Maintaining a terminal patient on artificial life support for a prolonged period in a vegetative state is not encouraged.

Visitors: Closest family will be around all of the time. Wider relatives and friends may visit; family will invite or discourage visit depending on health of child. It is possible that there will be large numbers of visitors from all over the UK and possibly overseas. It is Sikh religious practise to visit the sick and is seen as virtuous.

Organ donation: permitted to both donate and receive.

Post mortems: permitted

Care in the community: community members may be active in care. Gurdwara representatives may visit to offer prayers, and child can be taken to Gurdwara for prayers. Community can be close knit and might not appreciate visits from those outside family/community

Paediatric Palliative care plan for the Sikh Child

Name of child

Ward / unit

Patient number

Issue of care	Discussed	Outcome	Action
Interpreter required	Yes / no		
Conducive environment Privacy, visitors, surroundings, is there anything you need?			
Spiritual Religious needs Are your prayer needs met?	Yes / no		
Sikh Chaplain? Contact info	Yes / no		
Food and diet: require vegetarian? Eggs? No halal food.	Yes / no		
Prohibited substances are there any substances Food, medication, procedures that you would not like us to carry out.	Yes / no		
Dress, modesty are you happy with hospital gown; covering; privacy.	Yes / no		
Organ and tissue donation: Would you like to discuss further with Sikh Chaplain	Yes / no		
Any other concerns or wishes			

End of life care plan for the Sikh Child (last 24 hrs)

Name of child

Ward / unit

Patient number

Stage one (before death)

Issue of care	Discussed	Outcome	Action
Interpreter needed	Yes / no		
Would you like us to inform anyone?	Yes / no		
Conducive environment Privacy, visitors, surroundings, is there anything you need?	Yes / no		
Do you require anything for Spiritual and religious care; prayers, holy water	Yes / no		
Organ donation: has this been discussed; do you need further info			Offer Leaflet
Care of body: Is washing required? How else would you like to be involved?			
Is there anything else you would like to discuss			

End of life care plan for the Sikh Child (last 24 hrs)

Name of child

Ward / unit

Patient number

Stage two (after death)

Issue	Discussed	Outcome	Action
Coroner's referral: do you have enough information?	Yes / no/ na		Offer leaflet
Post mortem: any concerns?	Yes / no/na		
Body being re-patronised: do you have out of England form?	Yes / no/ na		
What to expect from hospital: invitation for medical follow up; psychology and chaplaincy			Provide Chaplaincy leaflets
Do you have a named contact?	Yes / no		
Funeral/burial arrangements: do you need any information?	Yes / no		
Is there anything else you would like to discuss?	Yes / no		

End of life pathway (last 24hrs)

Family wishes: Be prompted by their wishes; ask on all issues don't presume

Preferred place of death: No preference. Might prefer hospital as this may be seen as best place to care for person.

Inform: Mother and father together.

Belief about Suffering, Death and Dying:

Suffering and death is God's will, and therefore no one's fault. Sikhs believe that whosoever is born has eventually to die. The physical body is perishable, but the soul is eternal. The soul is a part of God and it yearns reunion with God. Liberation from the cycle of birth and death, from millions of life forms (reincarnation), is the basis of the Sikh understanding of the purpose of life. Human life is the gift of the Divine, and its termination, a return to the Divine source. Some people will have an understanding of karma, of the effect of doing good deeds and bad deeds. However there *may* be an understanding that for a child this may not be relevant, as a child is too innocent to do bad deeds.

Rituals around the dying: last prayers (*ardaas*) read, probably request local leader of Sikh Gurdwara or Chaplain. Must be done by bed, with family around. Some families may use Holy water, known as amrit. There might be a belief that sipping holy water at time of death can help child get to Heaven. Parents may sprinkle Holy water on body. Family might have Holy water or can be provided by Sikh chaplain. At the departure of their loved ones, Sikhs console themselves with the recitation of their sacred hymns.

Large number of visitors Wider relatives and friends may visit; family will invite or discourage visit depending on health of child. It is possible that there will be large numbers of visitors from all over the UK and possibly overseas.

Coroners: As normal. Ensure communication with family is maintained.

Treatment of the body: Ask family if mother wants to be involved in washing child or put clothes on. Very important to ask parents what they want, and to keep parents informed of what is happening. Parents may not know that they can ask/have a say in care and aftercare.

Expressions of grief: When a death occurs, Sikhs may exclaim 'Waheguru', the Wonderful Lord. As death is seen as a part of life cycle and part of God's plan, wailing and distressed expressions of grief are said to be discouraged in Sikhism. However in the case of a child dying this will naturally be difficult.

Rituals, washing, and treatment of the body:

Retain 5 k's at all times (bracelet, comb, undergarments etc). Do not remove after death.

Condolences: Normal comforting remarks. Make sure family are asked about wishes and involved in decision making. Ask if they want anything special for the child.

Rapid release:

Preferable. With minimum delay, the body is to be removed to the funeral home for expeditious cremation, unless the family is waiting for a close relative to arrive. Provide routine post-mortem care. Person should be cremated within 11 days ideally.

Funeral:

The funeral ceremony is Antam Sanskar. Everything should be done within 11 days. Family may be travelling from abroad to attend funeral so this may take longer.

Organ and tissue donation:

Permitted.

Burial

Always cremated, never buried, including children. Stillbirths or neonates may be buried.

Continue to bereavement pathway

Death

Suffering and death is God's will, and therefore no one's fault. Sikhs believe that whosoever is born has eventually to die. The physical body is perishable, but the soul is eternal. The soul is a part of God and it yearns reunion with God. Liberation from the cycle of birth and death, from millions of life forms (reincarnation), is the basis of the Sikh understanding of the purpose of life. Human life is the gift of the Divine, and its termination, a return to the Divine source. Some people will have an understanding of karma, of the effect of doing good deeds and bad deeds. However there *may* be an understanding that for a child this may not be relevant, as a child is too innocent to do bad deeds.

A good death for a Sikh: Chanting simran (a hymn from the Sikh Holy Book) is most important, as is the family being around

Immediately after death: There might be a belief that sipping holy water at time of death can help child get to Heaven. Parents may sprinkle Holy water on body. Family might have Holy water or can be provided by Sikh chaplain.

Wearing Gloves: For hygiene purposes.

Body: Family usually wish to wash the body after death, although they may do this at home/at funeral parlour. Involve the family in all decisions and invite them to participate – they may not understand what they are allowed to be involved due to cultural/language differences.

Funeral: The funeral ceremony is Antam Sanskar. Everything should be done within 11 days. Family may be travelling from abroad to attend funeral so this may take longer.

Burial: Sikhs are cremated. Still births and neonates may be buried.

Organ donation & Post mortems: permitted.

Refer to end of life pathway

Belief about death and the afterlife.

Death is a natural process and up to God's will. The best thing a family can do is pray

Funeral:

The funeral ceremony is Antam Sanskar. Everything should be done as soon as possible. Family may be travelling from

Burial: Sikhs are cremated.

Memory: there is a remembrance day, where the Guru Granth Sahib (Holy book) is recited. This might take 3 days, or bit by bit over many days. This is done only on the first anniversary.

Counselling: It would be appropriate, and important to offer support and counselling early. It is seen as hospital's responsibility to ensure bereavement support, as this may not be discussed in family/community. There is a taboo around mental health, counselling etc. in the community. If the family are educated and understand this need, it will be ok. If not, blame may be put on mother or other family members. This may cause problems for mother, such as depression, which may bring label 'mad' (pargal) which is a very bad label to have and can deeply affect relationships.

Siblings: May not have an understanding of suffering, particularly in not a baptised Sikh yet. Relying on God for support may be difficult for child to understand.

Condolences: Sikhism recommends that spiritual and emotional consolation in grief must be found through singing or listening of Shabad Kirtan and by reciting Gurbani. The emphasis is made on Nam Simran (meditation).

How can a non-Sikh help?

Ensure support is maintained in community.

Sikh Bereavement Care Plan

Name of patient

Ward / unit

Patient number

Issue of care	Discussed	Outcome	Action
Interpreter needed	Yes / no		
What sources of help support does family have			
Do you have named person for contact?	Yes / no		
Religious and Spiritual: do you need anything for your prayers, religious needs	Yes / no		
What to expect from hospital: invitations: A) follow up from Medics B) psychology; C) chaplaincy			Chaplaincy info
Funeral/ burial arrangements: do you need any information?			
Any other concerns or wishes			

Care plan for the Sikh patient

Name of Patient

Ward / unit

Patient number

Issue of care	Discussed	Outcome	Action
Interpreter required	Yes / no		
Conducive environment Privacy, visitors, surroundings, is there anything you need?			
Spiritual Religious needs Are your prayer needs met?	Yes / no		
Sikh Chaplain? Contact info	Yes / no		
Food and diet: require vegetarian? Eggs? No halal food.	Yes / no		
Prohibited substances are there any substances Food, medication, procedures that you would not like us to carry out.	Yes / no		
Dress, modesty are you happy with hospital gown; covering; privacy.	Yes / no		
Organ and tissue donation: Would you like to discuss further with Sikh Chaplain	Yes / no		
Any other concerns or wishes			