

Let's talk about...

Helping Your Preschooler in the Hospital

If your child is in the hospital, you can best support them by staying close, using simple words to explain what is happening, and through encouraging play and playing together.

How Preschoolers Think:

- They are very active and like to do things themselves.
- They learn by playing and asking “Why?”
- They sometimes confuse make-believe with real life.

What Causes Stress:

- Being away from family.
- Feeling like they have no control.
- Thinking the hospital is a “punishment.”
- Being afraid of needles, strangers, or loud machines.

How They Might React:

- Acting like a younger child.
- Getting angry or throwing tantrums.
- Being very clingy or very quiet.

How You Can Help:

- **Keep a Routine:** Try to do things at the same time every day, like reading or naps.



- **Use Simple Words:** Explain what is happening using simple and clear words.
- **Give Choices:** Let them pick between two things, like “Do you want to color or read a book?” This helps them feel in charge.
- **Be Honest:** Tell them when you are leaving and exactly when you will be back.
- **Connect Them with Home:** Pack their favorite blanket, toy, or stuffed animal.
- **Play and Distract:** Use bubbles, music, or art to keep their mind off more challenging things.
- **It's Not Their Fault:** Remind them often that they didn't do anything wrong; they are just there to get help from the medical team.

For more information or to connect with a Child Life Specialist, please visit: <http://ucdavis.health/childlife>