



## **Caring for the Hospitalized Child**

This guide includes developmental information, issues that may come up while in the hospital, and supportive strategies to maximize coping.

# Caring for the Hospitalized Child

## Newborn (Birth - 30 days)

### Development:

- Can see 8-12 inches away
- Hearing is developed
- Begins to babble

### Possible Stressors:

- Loud noises and sudden movement
- Blinks in response to bright light

### Possible Responses:

- Crying
- Hands to mouth

### Ways to Help:

- Involve caregivers (support holding, touching)
- Slow actions and dim lights
- Soft voices

### Support with:

- Soft music, singing or talking
- Close comfort holding (skin to skin)

## Infant (Birth - 1 year)

### Development:

- Learns through senses
- Bonds with family
- Afraid of strangers (8-10 months)
- Fears being away from family (9+ months)

### Possible Stressors:

- Being away from caregiver
- Loud noises and bright lights (overstimulation)

### Possible Responses:

- Not able to bond
- Lack of trust
- Fear
- Slowed development



### **Ways to Help:**

- Involve caregivers
- Keep routines
- Reduce stimulation (i.e. – low lights, sounds, few people)

### **Support with:**

- Light up toys
- Soft music
- Soothing voice
- Comfort holding
- Singing
- Familiar objects and family pictures from home

## **Toddler (1 - 3 years)**

### **Development:**

- Learns through play
- Wants to do things on their own
- More talkative
- Begins toilet training
- Benefits from routine
- Short attention span

### **Possible Stressors:**

- Fears being away from family
- Nightmares
- Being held down
- Loss of routine
- Increased fears (pain, strangers, medical equipment)

### **Possible Responses:**

- Acting younger than they are (including loss of newly learned skills)
- Not willing to cooperate
- Resistance (verbal and physical)
- Temper tantrums
- Clingy behavior

### **Ways to Help:**

- Involve caregivers
- Promote play
- Limit number of medical staff
- Offer choices
- Support activity and socializing
- Expect resistance
- Be honest; use simple words

### **Support with:**

- Interactive toys
- Music
- Positive statements
- Bubbles
- Favorite objects from home
- Singing
- Comfort holding



## Preschool (3 - 6 years)

### Development:

- Physically active
- Interested in self
- Basic language skills
- Seeks independence
- Learns through play and questions
- May confuse what is real and pretend

### Possible Stressors:

- Fears being away from family
- Loss of control
- Views hospitalization as “punishment”
- Limited independence
- May have trouble knowing what to expect
- Increased fears (pain, strangers, medical equipment)

### Possible Responses:

- Acting younger than they are
- Anger and acting out
- Dependency
- Withdrawal
- Guilt

### Ways to Help:

- Involve caregivers
- Promote play
- Prepare for medical treatment/procedures
- Explain what will happen and why
- Offer choices
- Avoid scary words (cut, bleed)
- Be honest

### Support with:

- Keep routine
- Music/Art
- Positive statements
- Bubbles
- Favorite objects
- Comfort holding

## School-age (6 - 12 years)

### Development:

- Curious and eager to learn
- Wants to master tasks

### Possible Stressors:

- Being away from family and peers
- May fear:
  - loss of control and mastery
  - Injury and pain
  - Illness, disability and death

### Possible Responses:

- Acting younger than they are
- Not as willing to cooperate
- Pulling away from others
- Sadness
- Anger and aggression that seems out-of-place
- Frustration

### Ways to Help:

- Involve caregivers
- Promote play
- Prepare for medical treatment/procedures
- Offer choices often
- Be honest
- Support participating in care

### Support with:

- Music/Art
- Positive statements
- Deep breathing
- Technology
- Favorite objects
- Guided imagery



## Adolescent (12 - 18 years)

### Development:

- More advanced thinking
- Friends matter most
- Concerned with body image

### Possible Stressors:

- Dependence on adults
- Being away from family and peers
- Fears: injury, pain, loss of identity
- Lack of privacy

### Possible Responses:

- Not as willing to cooperate
- Pulling away from others
- Anxiety
- Sadness
- Defense reactions

### Ways to Help:

- Provide privacy
- Respect choices; involve patient in their care and decisions
- Support self-expression
- Prepare for medical treatment/procedures
- Give permission to ask for pain medication
- Be honest

### Support with:

- Time with friends
- Music/Art
- Positive statements
- Deep breathing
- Technology
- Guided imagery

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