

Tips for Helping Siblings (When a brother or sister is sick)

How does my child's hospital stay affect my other children?

When a child is in the hospital, it can be a stressful time for their sibling. Their routine is upset and they may feel left out. Parents may be gone a lot, and the focus is on the sick child.

What should I watch for in my other children?

Siblings of a child in the hospital may show behavior changes. The sibling may:

- Eat, sleep or talk more, or less than normal.
- Use behavior to get attention, often in a negative way.
- Show anger or fear.
- Act younger and have a harder time than normal with some things. They may have a fear of separation.
- Have problems at school.

Siblings need to know about what is happening with their brother or sister. They may worry about things they do not understand. It is important to explain what is going on. Be honest and age-sensitive in what you tell the sibling. If you have questions ask to talk with the Child Life Specialist on your unit.

What can I do to help?

To help the siblings cope:

- Encourage questions. This will help with any fears they may have. It can also clear up things they don't understand.
- Tell them that it is okay to have feelings, such as anger, fear or sadness.
- Encourage them to share their feelings by talking, art or play.
- Have them visit as much as they feel comfortable. Talk with them in advance about what they might see or hear.
- Let siblings share what's going on. It's best not to keep it a secret. This will let them know it is okay to share their feelings.
- Let teachers know that extra support may be needed in the classroom.
- Be sure the sibling gets time alone with their parents or adult caregivers.
- Keep their routine as familiar as possible. This includes school, friends and activities.

Helping my other children (continued)

Keep the siblings connected. They can:

- Write or record a letter.
- Call their brother or sister as much as possible.
- Make a picture for the hospital room.
- Pack a bag of their brother or sister's favorite things.
- Record them reading a story or doing a skit.
- Collect favorite photos to bring to the hospital.



ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.