



HOW TO PREPARE FOR YOUR CHILD'S HOSPITALIZATION

FOR CHILDREN:

- Being hospitalized, going to the doctor, or having a procedure can be especially scary for a child.
- Children adjust better when they are given honest and age-appropriate information.
- If you do not know the answer, tell your child you do not know, but you will find out.
- Children are often more frightened when taken by surprise. Trust your instincts. Decide if your child will cope better if given information beforehand or will cope better if given very little notice. Think about how your child has coped with stressful situations in the past.
- We know that your child's stay can be a difficult and confusing time. We encourage you to bring your child's favorite blanket, toys and any other items that you feel will make your child more comfortable.

Some helpful guidelines:

Children 2-3 years old should be told 2-3 days before admission.

Children 4-7 years old should be told 4-7 days before admission.

Older children should be told a few weeks ahead of time and teenagers do best when they help participate in scheduling the hospitalization.

- Be prepared to explain why going to the hospital is necessary and what to expect.
- Choose a quiet time and use a calm, relaxed tone of voice.
- Encourage your child to discuss feelings and ask questions. They can prepare in their own way while they are still at home. Remember, what you say and how you say it may have a big impact on your child's attitude and comfort during their hospital stay.
- Reassure your child that you will be there with them during the hospital stay and that it is not a punishment.
- Encourage your child to ask questions and talk about their feelings.
- Let them know the doctors and nurses will help them feel better and when the doctor thinks they are well enough, they can go home.

Things children can do:	Things parents can do:
<p>Take deep breaths</p> <p>Squeeze your hand</p> <p>Count backwards</p> <p>Sing a favorite song</p> <p>Listen to soothing music</p> <p>Look at favorite book</p> <p>Think about a time they had fun and pretend to be there</p>	<p>Speak in a calm, soothing voice</p> <p>Hold your child's hand</p> <p>Stroke your child's face or arm</p> <p>Provide reassurance to your child</p> <p>Show trust in your child's medical team</p> <p>Encourage your child</p>

FOR PARENTS:

It is just as important for parents to prepare themselves when their child is scheduled for a procedure or preparing for a hospital stay.

- Learn as much as you can about the hospital. Read the UVa Children's Hospital Patient & Family Information Handbook that provides information about inpatient and outpatient services as well as outside resources. It may also help to take a tour of the area where you child will be and to meet the staff that will be involved in your child's care. Please visit Patient & Guest Services in the main hospital lobby for questions about community resources, lodging, computers, waiting rooms and playrooms, or general information questions.
- Take time to write down any questions you have so when you meet with the doctors you won't forget anything.
- Make plans to be at the hospital as much as you can. This may involve arranging time off from work and asking other family members and friends for help with the care of other family members and household responsibilities.
- Find support through talking with family and friends about your concerns. It can also be helpful to talk with other parents of children who have a similar medical condition. Social workers and chaplains are available for resources and support.
- You may want to keep a written journal to record you child's medical experience. Note cards to write down questions are available at the nurses station.
- It is important for you to take breaks from caring for your child when possible. Something as simple as going for a cup of coffee or taking a short walk can provide a needed time to renew your energy.
- Deep breathing, relaxation and exercise are good ways to help manage your stress.

FOR SIBLINGS:

- Be honest. Keep communication open. Allow siblings to ask questions. Children sense when information is being kept from them.
- Involve siblings in the hospitalization. Before visiting the hospital, describe medical equipment being used to care for their brother or sister, how their sibling may look different—bruises, tubes, bandages, etc.
- Encourage them to talk to their sibling even if they are unable to respond. Children use play to help them cope with stressful situations. If a sibling cannot visit, they can always draw pictures, write letters, or tape-record messages, etc.
- Maintain as close to normal routine as possible.
- Children should be encouraged to go to school, and participate in their usual activities as much as possible. It is important for parents and siblings to spend time together away from the hospital.

THROUGH YOUR CHILD'S EYES

Younger than age 3

- Being away from home and parents is probably your child's greatest concern.
- Allow your toddler to help pack his/her suitcase and take special items like a favorite blanket, toy or photograph. (Please label items).
- Read books with them about going to the hospital and encourage your child to express fears by playing hospital.
- Explain that getting sick is not their fault and that going to the hospital is not punishment for misbehavior.

Ages 4 to 12

- Magical thinking and fantasy play is in the minds of preschoolers.
- School age children fear harm due to needles or procedures. This age group also worries about being away from school and friends.
- Help ease the transition the same way as you would a younger child.
- Tell your child about the normal things that happen in a hospital such as watching TV or playing with toys.
- Be sure to tell your child where you will be if you cannot be at the hospital with them.
- Use “soft” words rather than “hard” words when describing what your child will feel. For example, say the nurse will ‘slide’ the needle in rather than ‘stick’ or ‘poke.’ When talking about surgery say, make an ‘opening,’ instead of ‘cut.’
- To prepare for surgery, let your child know they will be asleep and when they wake up, you will be there and your child won't remember the surgery.

Teenagers

- Teens are often reluctant to ask questions so it is important to encourage open communication.
- Thoroughly explain the need for surgery or hospitalization and encourage your teen to make a list of questions to ask the doctors and nurses about their condition.
- Include your teen in discussions about their care plan to give them an increased sense of control.
- Remember to respect your teen's privacy.
- If possible bring in their school books and assignments. School teachers are available to help them at the hospital.

Siblings:

Guilt – Children may feel responsible for the hospitalization. They may think that something they have said or done has caused the illness or injury.

Fear – Children may worry that the same thing will happen to them. They may be afraid they will "catch" the illness from the patient.

Jealousy – Children may think it is not fair that the patient is getting so much attention and wish to become sick themselves.

Anger – Children may be upset and resentful about the changes that the hospitalization has caused in their normal routine.

Neglect – Children may feel that their parents no longer love or care for them when more time is being spent on the patient.