

Behavior changes in school age children (6 to 11 years old)



Your child may show changes in behavior during and after their hospital stay. As a parent, these changes may concern you. Please know that some of these changes are normal and most often go away with time.

The changes listed below are normal behaviors for this age group. Your child may have already “outgrown” a behavior and then it comes back. Or, a behavior may happen more often than normal. These may be how your child reacts to stress.

This age group fears:

- Being away from you.
- Losing a body part.
- Feeling pain.
- Losing control.
- Death and not waking up after surgery.

What changes could I see in my child?

Your child may have one or more of these behaviors:

- Spends less time with friends
- Acts out, such as yelling or refusing to help
- Wants more attention
- Asks for help with things they once did without help
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Changes in eating habits
- Avoids school
- Mood swings

What can I do to help my child?

Here are some tips that may help you and your child:

- Give your child time to play. Play is a way a child can learn, feel in control and express how they feel.
- Let them know when you will be with them. Let them know who will help them when you are not there.
- Let them ask questions.
- Let them tell you what they think will happen and how they feel about it.
- Support their feelings and let them know they are normal.
- Tell them which part of their body the doctor is trying to help. They may need help to learn about their body functions and illness.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Behavior changes in school age children, continued

- Let them know if there will be any changes in how they may look.
- Tell them what their doctor will do to help make them feel less pain.
- Let your child spend time with friends.
- Set limits, and discipline your child as you normally would once you go home.
- Return your child to their normal routine as soon as possible.
- Give your child tasks that are equal to their abilities, such as taking out the trash and setting the table.
- Let your child's teachers know about the hospital stay. This is so they can help your child if behavior changes happen.
- Let your child make choices about their daily routine and activities when possible.

Remember that changes in behavior are common and most often go away. This is your child's way of trying to cope with their hospital stay. If you have concerns or questions before you leave the hospital, please talk with a nurse, doctor or child life specialist.

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.