

Helping your child cope with scars

Your child may have a small or large scratch, cut or scrape on their face or body that could turn into a scar. This teaching sheet covers how to help your child cope with having a scar.

How can I help while my child has a cut or scratch that is healing?

- Talk with your child about what a scar is and how their body heals. You could say, “A scar is a red, pink or white patch of skin that grows where you used to have a cut or hurt part of your skin. Scars are how your skin gets better after being hurt.”
- Talk with your child about how scars are normal. Most people have at least one scar somewhere on their body.
 - Show your child one of your scars, or talk about the scars that other family members or friends have.
 - Your child may feel more comfortable with their healing cut or scratch when you show and remind your child that scars are a normal part of life.
- When you talk with your child:
 - Focus on how their body is healing, getting better and getting stronger.
 - Remind your child that their healing cut or scratch reminds them of how brave they are and how their body is strong and growing to get better.
- When children have a healing cut or scratch that changes how they look:
 - Many parents may treat them differently or act differently around them. Do your best to keep your relationship and home life as normal as possible.
 - Remind your child that you love them just as you did before.

What should I do about mirrors?

It can be tempting to allow or encourage your child to avoid mirrors, but this may not serve your child well over time.

- Some parents try to protect their child from seeing how they look. They may do this out of fear their child may feel or think negatively about themselves.
- It may make your child feel like something is wrong with them if you encourage them to avoid seeing how they look.
- At some point, your child will see their cut, scratch or scar when they do everyday activities, such as:
 - Their reflection in a cell phone or camera.
 - Video chats.
 - Their reflection from a window or mirror.

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

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- Instead, it can help to take a few moments (when your child is ready) to look at their cut, scratch or scar. You may use a small, hand-held mirror. Looking in the mirror lets your child talk about what they see.
 - Are there bruises?
 - Are there stitches?
 - Is there ointment or swelling?
 - What will go away?
 - What may stay for a long time?

This will help your child understand what they see and feel more comfortable. Remind your child of the healing process and what has remained the same about them. Take this time to share what you love about your child that is not focused on how they look, such as:

- Helpful
- Kind
- Good friend
- Loving
- Good at basketball
- Good at reading

How can I help when my child's cut or scratch becomes a scar?

- Try not to project your feelings about your child's scar onto your child. If you are worried about the scar and your child is not, do your best to keep your worry away from your child.
- Use markers or thread to put a matching scar on your child's favorite doll, toy or stuffed animal. Your child may feel more normal about their scar when their favorite toy has the same scar in the same place.
- If your child is worried about what other children will say about the scar, take the time to talk with your child about it.
- You can help your child come up with an answer to give when asked about the scar, such as:
 - “I have this scar because my body is getting better.”
 - “I was hurt, but I am healing now.”
 - “This is my scar. It shows how brave I am.”
- You can role-play with your child as well. Act like a friend or classmate. This gives your child the chance to practice responding to questions and feel more comfortable.
- If your child is very worried about their scar and how they will be seen by others, you can help your child to use covering items, such as different types of clothing, different hair styles or makeup. These type of covering items can help your child feel more comfortable as they get used to the scar.

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Who else can I talk with about helping my child?

- A child life specialist can help your child cope with their scar and other parts of the hospital stay. Ask them for a hand-held mirror and tips on how to talk with your child about scars.
- If your child seems very worried about their scar after going home, talk with their doctor or school counselor to find other ways to help.

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.

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