

# When a brother or sister is in the hospital: helping teens cope

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Your teen may show behavior changes when their sibling (brother or sister) is sick. These changes may happen from trying to cope. As a parent, this may worry you. There are some things you can do to help.

## Common changes you may see in your teen

- Changes in self-esteem (how your teen thinks and feels about themselves)
- Changes in amount of time spent with friends
- Wants more attention or more time alone
- Asks for help with things they once did by themselves
- Loses interest in hobbies, such as sports or other activities
- Changes to eating or sleeping habits
- Acting out, such as refusing to help or risk-taking behaviors
- Concerns with how they look
- Concern or even lack of concern for their sibling
- Embarrassed about their sibling
- Takes on roles of other family members, such as filling in for parents
- Feels neglected
- Worries about the future

## How to help your teen cope

- Give your teen time to talk about the hospital. Involve them in discussions about plans of care for their sibling.
- Answer their questions. Be open. Tell the truth.
- Encourage time with friends.
- Share some of your own feelings or concerns when appropriate, and let your teen know it is normal to feel that way. They may feel:
  - Scared
  - Jealous
  - Mad
  - Guilty
  - Embarrassed
- Talk about ways to cope with feelings, such as:
  - Talk to a trusted adult.
  - Write in a journal.
  - Exercise.
- Spend time alone with your teen.
- Let your teen know that you love them. Give them hugs and comfort.

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

## When a brother or sister is in the hospital, continued

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- Help your teen keep their normal routine when possible (school, sports or other activities).
- Allow them to be a teen. Limit caregiving responsibilities.
- Include them in their sibling's care if they want to help. Let them:
  - Visit the hospital.
  - Paint something for the hospital room or pack items from home.
  - Send pictures.
  - Call, send text messages or video chat with their sibling.
- Tell your teen's teachers or school counselors about what is going on in your family. This is so they will be aware of possible changes in your teen's mood, behavior or grades.
- Choose a "go-to" adult when primary caregivers are not available.

**Remember:** Your teen is still the same person even though they may act differently when their sibling is sick. These behavior changes are common and most often go away. This is your teen's way of trying to deal with their sibling's sickness and hospital stay.

**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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