

Tips for hospitalized school age children (6 to 11 years old)

Children react to and cope with being in the hospital based on their age. The information below includes fears and reactions to being in the hospital. There are ways to help your school age child cope with medical experiences.

Your child may show behavior changes during and after their hospital stay. They may regress. This means they do things they have outgrown. Or, a behavior may happen more often than normal. This may be how your child reacts to stress. These changes may concern you. Some of these changes are normal and most often go away with time.

This age group fears:

- Being away from family and friends
- Losing a body part or a change in how they look
- Pain
- Losing control
- Death or not waking up after surgery

What changes could I see in my child?

Your child may have 1 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 can do themselves
- Changes in sleep
- Changes in eating
- Avoids school or schoolwork
- Mood swings

What can I do to help my child?

Here are some tips that may help you and your child during and after being in the hospital:

- Give your child time to play. Play allows a child to:
 - Learn.
 - Feel in control.
 - Share how they feel.
- Tell them:
 - When you will be with them.
 - Who will help when you are not there.

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

Tips for hospitalized school age children (6 to 11 years old), continued

- Talk to them about why they are in the hospital.
 - Tell them what part of their body the doctor is trying to help.
 - Teach them about how their body works and what needs to be fixed.
 - Be honest and explain what is happening. Use words they understand.
 - Tell them if there will be any changes in how they look.
- Let your child:
 - Ask questions.
 - Tell you what they think will happen and how they feel about it.
- Support their feelings. Tell them their feelings are normal.
- Be present and join in your child's care as much as possible.
- Be honest about pain. Let them know the doctor will give them medicine to help them feel better.
- Bring comfort items or favorite activities from home.
- Help your child connect with family and friends.
- Set limits and discipline your child like you would at home.
- Let your child make choices about their daily routine and activities when possible.
- Go back to their normal routine as soon as possible.
- Give your child tasks they can do, such as taking out the trash and setting the table.
- Tell your child's teachers about the hospital stay. They can help your child if behavior changes happen in school.

Remember that behavior changes are common and most often go away. This is how your child copes 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.

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