



How to Help Siblings Cope

A child's illness can affect the entire family. Here are some things that can help.

What siblings need :

Routine: Normal day-to-day activities such as going to school or day care will help siblings feel safe when separated from caregivers and family.

Be honest: It is important to be honest and talk to siblings using words they can understand to explain why their brother or sister is in the hospital. This will help children to feel less afraid.

Talk: Children need lots of opportunities to express their feelings as they try to understand what is happening.

Behaviors to be aware of:

Each child reacts differently when their brother or sister is in the hospital. It is normal for siblings to feel:

- Fear- "Can I catch what my brother has?"
- Guilt- "Did my fight with my brother make him sick?"; "Why is he sick and not me?"
- Anger- "My brother is getting so many presents in the hospital, why can't I have new toys?"
- Confusion- "What is going to happen to my brother in the hospital?"; "When is my brother coming home?"
- Loneliness- "What about me? Nobody is paying attention to me."

You might see this in your child's behavior by:

- Acting out; aggressive play
- Becoming more clingy or quieter than usual
- Regression to behaviors of their younger years (thumb sucking, bed wetting)
- Complaints of stomach aches, headaches, or other sickness
- Changes in sleeping or eating habits

How you can help:

Siblings need extra support when a brother or sister is in the hospital. Include your children as much as possible to answer questions and lessen fears.

Activities you can do at home to keep siblings in touch:

- Draw pictures or write letters to take to the hospital
- Set up special one-on-one sibling visits
- Talk on the phone, video chat, email, send mail
- Ask siblings to help pack favorite items to send to the hospital such as favorite stuffed animals, DVDs, music or games
- Create a CarePage at www.carepages.com

Before visiting the hospital, talk to siblings about what they can expect to see and do. Remind them that it is always OK to ask questions.

Activities to do at the hospital:

- Make decorations for the hospital room (signs, pictures)
- Play games, read books, play music, work on art projects
- Visit the playroom

Books you can read together:

- **What About Me? When Brothers and Sisters Get Sick**- A storybook for 5-10 year old brothers and sisters of hospitalized children. By Alan Peterkin. 1992
- **Hi, My Name is Jack**- A storybook for 3-7 year old brothers and sisters of children with a chronic illness. By Christina Beal-Sullivan. 2000
- **When Molly Was in the Hospital**- A book for brothers and sisters of hospitalized children. By D. Duncan. 1994
- **When Someone Very Special Has a Serious Illness**- A workbook for 7-13 year old brothers and sisters of hospitalized or chronically ill children. By Marge Heegard. 1991

If you would like help talking to your child about what to expect when they visit their brother or sister in the hospital, contact your Child Life Specialist or contact the Child Life Department at 312.227.3270

