

Supporting Your Loved One in the Hospital

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Age	Stressor of Hospitalization	How to Support
Birth - 1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Separation from parents •Bonding disruptions •Transference of caregiver anxiety •Later in infancy separation anxiety •Experiencing pain/painful procedures •Over or under stimulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Hold and cuddle often; child feels safe in your arms •Keep to a routine as often as possible •Provide comfort items from home •Appropriate stimulation/play (ask staff for item if needed)
1 year - 3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Separation from parents •Bonding disruptions •Transference of caregiver anxiety •Disruption of routine •Disruption to development •Fear of bodily injury •Temper tantrums •Regression •May believe illness or hospitalization is punishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Allow to play on floor (mats available) •Visit playroom or atrium with child as able •Let them know that being sick is not their fault, they did nothing wrong •Keep to a routine as often as possible •Play with your child as able (ask staff for item if needed)
3 years - 6 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Most vulnerable age for hospitalization •Fear of separation and unknown •Transference of caregiver anxiety •Fear of body penetration/mutilation •Loss of control •Interruption to school/activities •Regression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Visit playroom or atrium with child as able •Let them know that being sick is not their fault, they did nothing wrong •Keep to a routine as often as possible •Play with your child as able (ask staff for item if needed)
6 years - 12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Fear of separation and loss of control •School concerns •Body image concerns/privacy •Concerns/fears injury or mutilation •Fears of illness, death, and disability •Separation from friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Encourage letters, messages, videos from class, friends, family •Visit playroom or atrium with child as able •Let them know that being sick is not their fault, they did nothing wrong •Play video, cards, and games •Some may want privacy or same sex caregivers at times
12 years - 18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Concerned with body image, social group status, and sexuality •Can feel identity is threatened •Difficulty with dependence on adults •Struggles with separation from peers and family •Fears loss of identity •Fears bodily injury and pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Encourage letters, messages, videos from class, friends, family •Visit playroom or atrium with child as able •Respect need for privacy and independence •Address body image and sexuality •Address concerns about future •Same sex caregivers may be preferred

General Guidance for ALL Children and Adolescents

- Primary caregiver support is crucial through hospitalization.
- Meals are provided for you and your child. Let the cafeteria know your preferences. Coffee, water, tea, and snacks are available in the pantry for your child if they should be drinking and eating.
- Hold and cuddle your child as needed.
- Be near during assessments and procedures, sitting next to or holding infants and small children.
- Expect regression and be extra accepting and patient.
- Give them realistic choices.
- Allow and accept emotions, both theirs and yours. Find healthy ways to express emotions.
- Please let us know if you need a break.
- Bring security items, comfort items, and favorite toys from home. WiFi is available.
- Stay in touch with family and friends via phone and video.
- Ask medical/nursing staff for interventions to reduce pain during needle procedures.
- Ask to visit with our Child Life Specialist if you, your child, or family need support.



Scan to Watch a Short Video
on Supporting Your Child in the Hospital

Source: University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital

