

Helping your child cope with their worries

WHEN COMING INTO HOSPITAL



Coming into hospital can feel different for every child. Your child may feel excited to see people they know or have treatments that will help them feel better. They may also have some questions and worries about their condition and what will happen in hospital. For most children, it can really help to talk to you and or their team about feelings and questions that they have.



This toolkit has information about lots of different ways you can talk to your child about how they are feeling and find ways to help them cope when they have questions or worries.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

Children express their worries in different ways. Some signs that you might want to look out for are:

- Changes in behaviour at home or at school
- Difficulties sleeping
- Tummy aches and headaches
- Changes in appetite
- Not wanting to talk about hospital
- Finding separations difficult or wanting more reassurance e.g. cuddles
- Asking lots of questions or the same question several times
- Avoiding things that remind them of hospital or surgery



THINGS TO REMEMBER

All of these things are normal and most children feel anxious before surgery. What is important is spotting if your child's behaviour is changing and giving them opportunities to talk about their feelings with you or their medical team if this is the case.

We know that:

- Children have resilience as well as vulnerabilities.
- They may need help identifying what they are feeling.
- They may need help to think of things that will help and protect them.



Top tips and strategies

Create a bag of feelings

With your child, you might like to draw a bag of feelings about coming into hospital. Ask them to write out all of the feelings (both positive and negative) that they can imagine. Ask them to draw in the bag how much space that feeling takes up until the bag is full. You can ask your child when do they normally have that feeling, what helps them feel better and do they feel that they need extra help with the feeling?

Create a list of coping strategies

You can put together a list of coping strategies with your child. They can pick the ones that help or try out different options and rate them out of 10.

Things that help me are:	Score/10
Listening to music	/10
Talking to a friend	/10
Talking to mum/dad/carer	/10
Being on my own	/10
Going for a walk/relaxation	/10
Watching TV	/10



Keep busy

It can help your child to identify the strengths they have which can help them cope and get the better of any emotions that they have. Try looking at the strengths below and ask your child to circle which ones they have or their friends and family would say they have. Ask friends and family to write down things that your child does that they appreciate. Being specific can really help. Here's an example of a strengths grid:

Funny	I always give it my best	Supportive
Caring	Loving	Brave
A good friend	Hard working	Kind

Help your child understand that what they feel is normal and okay

Emotions are a natural part of life; they make us human. It's okay for everyone to feel angry or scared at times, but it's how we deal with our feelings that makes the difference. Learning to identify and control our emotions from a young age is important to becoming successful adults.

You can help by

What you say: Use “I feel _____” statements in front of your child to not only identify feelings and link them to situations but also to show them how to talk about feelings.

Example: “I feel disappointed that it’s raining today. I really wanted to take a walk outside.” It is important to do this in a calm way and as part of appropriate conversations for your child. If you are feeling particularly stressed or overwhelmed, it will not always be helpful for your child to hear about this.

What you do: Copying those around them is an important way that children learn. One way you can teach your child appropriate ways to express and manage difficult feelings is by modeling to them how you do it. If you would like your child to use a quieter voice when they are angry, then show them this is possible by keeping your voice quiet too.

Example: Saying things like ‘I can feel that I am getting ____, maybe I’d better ____.’

Reflect: Identify/name the emotion that you think your child is feeling. Help your child recognise the emotions they are feeling by identifying their outward signs of the feeling.

Example: “Your face looks like you feel frustrated right now with your homework. What is going on inside?”

Validate: Show you can see why that emotion might be happening, why it is understandable that they might be feeling that way.

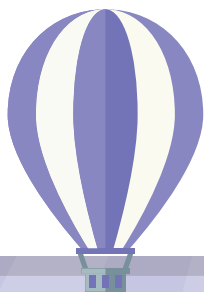
Example: Often a simple “I can see how that would be ____” or “I’d feel ____ too if that happened to me” can help children feel calmer.

Prompt Problem Solving: Help your child brainstorm possible solutions to the trigger that set off the negative emotion.

Example: “Let’s think of some ways to tackle your homework, like breaking down the tasks or take small breaks.”

Pick the right time: There are times when talking about an emotional situation may not be helpful or even make things worse, like when the emotion is at “level 10 meltdown.”

Example: In this case, your first response may be to soothe or distract. Soothe your child with a hug or distract them with their favorite activity. Once the intensity has lessened, follow up with a conversation.



WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

Please talk to the play specialist, nurse looking after you or clinical psychologist if you would like any help in supporting your child in hospital and in the lead up to their admission. The nurse looking after you will be happy to contact them for you.

Useful resources

The website Little Parachutes sells a collection of books that help children cope with worries, health issues and new experiences.

Website: www.littleparachutes.com



These toolkits have been written by NHS clinical psychologists and neuropsychologists working for University Hospitals Bristol. They have been co-designed with service users and healthcare staff. These toolkits are only intended to provide general advice and information. Please discuss your individual needs with your doctor or specialist nurse. If you would like more information about psychology services please go to:

<http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/support-for-patients/psychological-health-services/>

We would like to thank patients and other healthcare staff for their contributions to this toolkit.

For access to other patient toolkits please go to the following address:

<http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/support-for-patients/psychological-health-services/resources/>

For this leaflet in large print, audio or PDF format, please email patientleaflets@uhbristol.nhs.uk

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