

How do I cope when my CHILD IS IN HOSPITAL?



When you first find out your child is ill, you are likely to feel worried about many things. How will your child be affected? What sort of future will they have? How will your life change? What should you tell friends and relatives? Some parents also feel angry, lonely and at times it may feel hard to cope.



Remember, it is natural to have these feelings. It may help to

think about how you have come through difficult situations in the past. What are the strategies that you have used before when you have been worried? Which of these could you use now?

This toolkit is designed to help you cope with these difficult feelings that may arise and help you realise the importance of looking after yourself as well as your child.

Top tips and strategies

1

Learn how to tolerate uncertainty

Worries are often used as a coping mechanism to predict certain outcomes for uncertain situations. However, worrying about things such as 'how your child will be affected' cannot prevent future outcomes. Although worrying may seem like the best thing to do, it might lead us to feel worse and unable to cope.

You can challenge your need for certainty (your worries). Look at other times in your life when you have tolerated uncertainty without worrying or try new things that you are uncertain about in order to get used to this feeling of uncertainty.

Use this **APPLE** acronym to help you tolerate uncertainty:

Acknowledge the uncertainty as it comes to mind.

Pause and breathe, don't react as you would normally.

Pull back; remind yourself that this is only a worry and that this supposed need for certainty is not necessary or helpful.

Let go of the idea that you need certainty. Remind yourself it is only a feeling or a thought and this does not constitute fact. These thoughts and feelings will pass and you do not have to respond to them.

Explore your present moment; attend to the here and now by noticing your breathing and the ground beneath you. Shift your attention to something else before you noticed the worried thought.



2

Keep a diary

Some parents find it helpful to keep a diary of their experiences and feelings during their time in hospital. This can be a record for you and your child of your time here and can be useful to reflect back on when you are out of hospital.

3

Look after yourself

Make sure you get adequate sleep (between seven and nine hours) and that you are eating properly. Being well rested and well fed will help you to be alert and well-functioning for your child during the day.

Try to keep in contact and stay connected with friends and family during this challenging time. As you are there for your child, your friends and family can be there for you too.

You may find you feel more tired than normal, even though you do not feel you are doing that much. It can be really helpful to get out of the hospital every day for a little while.



WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

Working with your medical team

We want to help and support you, please tell us about what support you need and any questions that you might have. If you feel you need extra support please tell us.

Some services have specific psychology support that can help you with tips, ideas and strategies to help you cope. Speak to your nurse who will be able to refer you.

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/going-to-hospital.aspx>



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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