

How do I help my child's SIBLINGS COPE?



A child being admitted to hospital is something that can affect the whole family, not just the child themselves. Brothers and sisters can also experience worries about being away from their sibling, feel jealous that they won't be sharing time with you, and have questions about their sibling's illness and what is happening in hospital.



Siblings often need to cope with and adapt to changes in all aspects of their life, for example:

being without mum or dad for long periods of time, new or different routines, an unfamiliar environment and worries about whether their brother or sister will be okay. It can also be very difficult for parents attempting to meet the needs of the child in hospital and the child at home.

This toolkit is designed to help you figure out how best to support your child in coping when their sibling is ill and in hospital.

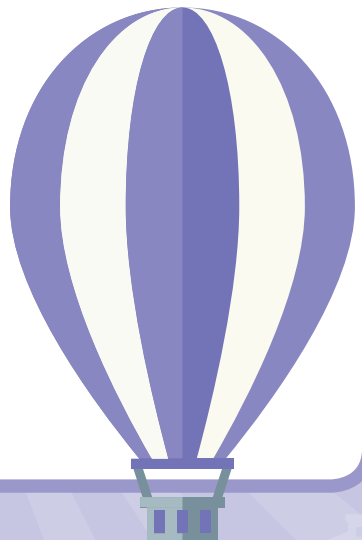
THINGS TO REMEMBER

We know that young people often:

- understand more than adults think
- benefit from being involved
- feel safer when they know what is going on

We know that children and young people cope much better when they understand why their brother/sister is coming into hospital and what will happen to them whilst their sibling is in hospital. This is because they will know what to expect and will hopefully have a greater idea of how they fit into the hospital picture.

Your child's concerns about their sibling being ill are normal. It is helpful to talk to them about them and help them identify and discuss their feelings. Encourage them to ask questions and answer them honestly using words that they will understand.



Top tips and strategies

Here are some common reactions siblings might experience and some top tips on things that can help:

Worries and fears

Your child and their sibling may be worried about what will happen in hospital. Young children often have active imaginations and may have lots of ideas and fears about what it will be like. It is important to encourage children to talk about what they think hospital will be like. You may want to talk about the causes of illness, as some children worry that they have caused their siblings illness or that it is contagious. Answer their questions truthfully.

Jealousy

Sometimes siblings can feel left out when their brother or sister is in hospital, since their sibling will be getting more attention. It is natural for family members and friends to ask lots of questions about the child in hospital but this can mean the sibling feels forgotten. You can help your child feel more included by bringing the conversation back to them. For example, if someone exclaims, "Tom is looking better today," you could say, "Yes, and look, Sarah has drawn a lovely picture!"



Missing their parents

It can be hard for younger children to understand why you are away for so long and why their sibling has not come home yet. You may wish to make a special sibling calendar to keep at home for the duration of your hospital admission. You could mark important events at the hospital, days when they can visit the hospital, days when other family members will look after them and most importantly the days when mum or dad are at the hospital or at home. You can add in special times when you are just there for them. This will keep them aware of what is happening at the hospital and will also reassure them that you will return home.

Talking about how they feel

Some children may feel protective of you and worried about burdening you with their fears. It may be important to let your child know that you would like to help them cope with how they are feeling. Let them know that you understand that they may be feeling frightened, angry or upset and that these feelings are normal. You may want to help your child talk about how they are feeling by drawing some different mood faces, your child can point to one face to tell you how they are feeling.



Calm



Worried



Happy



Angry

Unsettled routine

Having a sibling in hospital can be unsettling for children; it can lead to worries of feeling unloved or feeling not as important as their siblings. It's important to keep a routine so that siblings feel valued and ensure they feel that some part of their world has stayed the same. It will give children back a sense of control and will allow them to know what to expect. Perhaps, if friends or family ask if they can help, you could request they take your other child to their activities, so that your child can keep to their schedule and feel a sense of normality.

WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

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

Rainbow Trust children's charity offer a wide range of support for families who have a child with a life threatening or terminal illness.

Website: www.rainbowtrust.org.uk

Email: enquiries@rainbowtrust.org.uk

Tel: 01372 363 438

Sibs charity offers a range of advice and support for siblings and parents of people with a disability.

Website: www.sibs.org.uk



WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

Together for short lives is a charity which supports children, who are expected to have short lives and their families.

Website: www.togetherforshortlives.org.uk

Tel: 0117 989 7820

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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