

Supporting your child AFTER AN INJURY



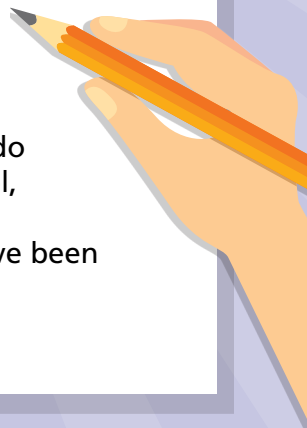
When your child has an injury, it can take time to for them, and you, to adjust. Your child may be experiencing physical symptoms, such as pain or changes to their appearance, and may be feeling worried and upset by the injury or how it happened. These feelings can improve with time and as parents, the most important thing you can do is learn what to look out for and support your child in asking for help if they need it.



This toolkit is designed to help you find out more about the most common reactions in children, and to give you advice about what you can do to help.

You may notice the following reactions in your child, as they are adjusting to their injury:

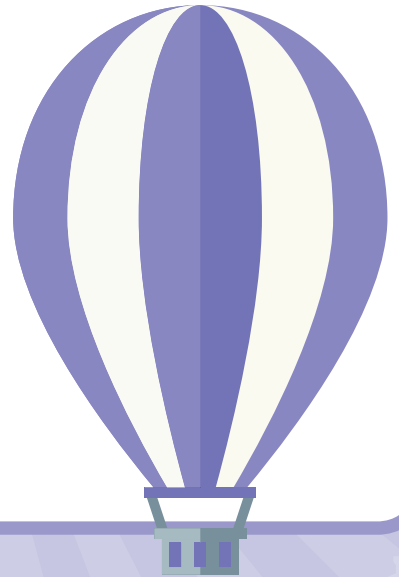
- Appearing sweaty, tense, sick, exhausted or bad-tempered.
- Being distractible and/or more angry than usual, maybe finding concentrating difficult or appearing to react more than usual.
- Appearing unsettled or saying they are having trouble sleeping, e.g. nightmares and night terrors.
- Experiencing bedwetting, changes in appetite.
- Talking about feeling guilty or believing that the incident happened because they misbehaved.
- They may talk about memories of the injury, or these may be triggered by reminders of where and how it happened, for example loud noises or smells. They may avoid places and things that remind them of how it happened.
- Seeming younger than they did before and demanding more attention. Being clingy or frightened of being alone and reluctant to try new things.
- Fear of people in uniform such as nurses, because they associate them with painful procedures.
- Children may worry about not being able to do the same activities as before, returning to school, any changes in their physical abilities or in way they look, particularly if their faces or hands have been affected.



As parents, you feel understandably over-protective for a while and sometimes you might have some feelings of guilt, memories or 'flashbacks' of the incident.

You may find sleeping more difficult than usual or feel on edge or more irritable. You may also worry about changes in your child's behaviour. All of these feelings and reactions are normal and are likely to settle in time, although this can take a few weeks. If you feel worried that your feelings are not settling down, you can talk to your child's team and or your GP who can direct you to help and support.

Other family members, including brothers and sisters, may also have a range of feelings, particularly if they witnessed the injury. Giving them extra time and the opportunity to talk can be important.



There are several things you can do:

- In the first few days and weeks after the injury help your child to feel safe and provide physical reassurance and comfort.
- Observe your child's behaviour, listen carefully and allow him or her to talk about feelings and worries if he or she wants to.
- Instead of focusing on what has happened, try to concentrate on the present and on how to best support your child and other family members who may have been affected.
- Make sure you are looking after yourself; this will help you and your child.
- It is important to recognise that all of those who witnessed the incident may be in need of support.
- It is advisable to talk to visitors, particularly younger children, about what to expect before visiting the ward. Hospital environments can be quite daunting.
- When your child has questions, you may want to use puppets, drawings and stories to help them make sense of what happened, and to prevent them making up their own version of events.

- Children tend to ask questions when they are ready, so it is okay to be led by them and answer questions as honestly as you can when they come up, rather than initiating conversations when your child is not ready.
- It's important to return to your normal routines as soon as possible, as this can help your child build up their confidence and a feeling of safety.
- Your social network is a great source of support, so finding time to spend with family and friends when you can is very important.
- Be aware that the other children in the family may need help and more reassurance than usual.
- Although it is understandable that your child will want to avoid things which are upsetting, this can make it harder to overcome fear and slows down progress. For this reason, try and encourage your child to gradually face the reminders of what has happened for increasing lengths of time. You should find that over time the fear decreases.
- Praise your child whenever he or she faces these fears and talk about the next steps or goals.
- Finally, make sure you seek out support for yourself from family and friends and ask for help if you need it. This will help you to support your child and other children in the family.

WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

You may find that after several weeks, things are not improving and life does not seem to be returning to normal. If this is the case, please speak to your medical team in the hospital or your GP. If there is a psychologist in your medical team, you may like to ask to be referred to this service. There is some useful information listed below about how to cope with anxiety.

What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety
(What-to-Do Guides for Kids) Paperback by Dawn Huebner

Trauma and Coping:

www.minded.org.uk/families/index.html#/id/56cc7831a55aa90a52727c3a

www.calm.com

www.mindfulnessforteens.com

www.mentalhealth.org.uk/podcasts-and-videos/podcasts-for-your-wellbeing



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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