

Homecoming: Minimizing the Effects of Hospitalization

From the moment a child is admitted to Arkansas Children's Hospital (ACH), everyone's goal is to send them home healthy. That's why our doors are open. We also know that going home can present stress for the child and the parents.

We hope this brochure will help to reduce homecoming stresses, and make the transition from hospital to home as smooth as possible.

Recognizing The Signs

Children may behave in ways that don't seem normal for them when they first return home from the hospital. Many children show signs of anger, sadness, shame or distrust; they may even think of themselves as changed or different after a hospital stay. Children don't always know why they feel this way and may find it hard to talk about their feelings.

Instead of being able to tell their parents about the fears they may be experiencing, children more often show their feelings through their behavior. These are some of the common ways in which children show us their fears:

- afraid of leaving home, meeting new people or trying new situations.
- upset when left alone, clinging to their parents or seeking extra attention.
- afraid to go to sleep or complaining about the dark.
- more aggressive, angry or disobedient.
- seem not interested in things they used to enjoy
- not wanting to talk or tell you what they need.
- not wanting to do things for themselves.

Understanding Is The Key

If these behaviors sound familiar, there are ways you can help your child cope. Instead of dismissing these behaviors or allowing yourself to be upset by them, try a little understanding. Remember, your child is trying to express feelings that may be hard to put into words. Encourage them to talk about things that happened while in the hospital and then talk about these events or the reasons for the hospital stay.

It is common for children to continue thinking about their medical experiences for quite some time after they have left the hospital. Even after discussing an issue, you may find your child repeating questions or sharing concerns you thought were resolved. Be truthful and consistent, offer comfort and clarify your child's understanding of the hospital and the things that happened there.

Specific Things You Can Do

The following suggestions may be help in dealing with your child's feelings about their medical encounter once you've returned home:

1. Return to your child's former routine as quickly as possible. In this way, your child will know things are getting back to normal.
2. Be kind, firm and consistent with your child. Be careful not to become overly protective or permissive, and you should also be careful about being extremely strict or harsh.
3. Avoid making your child the center of attention because of their illness.
4. Be truthful about the questions or concerns your child shares with you. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't fake it. Explain that you don't know the answer but that you will find out. Your honesty will keep your child's trust in you.

Helping Younger Children Cope

After a hospital experience, you may notice your child having a difficult time being away from you even for short periods of time. Things your child once did on their own now seem difficult or no longer fun. Demands for attention may be more frequent.

Following are a few steps to help a younger child adjust to returning home from the hospital:

1. Encourage your child to do things they enjoy and can do on their own. Remember to praise the independent behavior and reassure your child of their ability to do things by themselves.
2. Help your child feel safe and secure by holding and cuddling, while not pampering. This will comfort your child and show your understanding of how they are feeling.
3. Avoid leaving your child for long periods or overnight until they are comfortable and trust you will return.
4. Provide materials such as clay, paints and doctors or nurses kits that will allow your child to act out feelings through play situations. Allow your child to direct the activity and to talk freely about medical events.



Fear not illness, for this place of care, love and hope is for you.

Helping Older Children Cope

As children grow older, they become more concerned with how an illness or medical procedure may change them, especially their physical appearance. Older children may worry about how a medical experience will affect their relationships with friends or growing independence. As a parent, you can play an important role in reassuring them and helping them cope.

Following are a few steps to help an older child adjust to leaving the hospital:

1. Provide information to your child. Prompt them to participate by asking about areas that might be of concern.
2. Be sensitive to your child's need for privacy.
3. Guide your child in having a positive attitude toward any changes in appearance or lifestyle by allowing them to express feelings or concerns. Allow your child to direct their care as much as possible.
4. Encourage your child to participate in activities that increase their abilities and independence. Being with friends will reassure your child that they are still accepted by others.

Including Your Other Children in The Experience

Many times children at home feel left out and uncertain about what is happening to their sibling who is in the hospital. They need to know what's happening and to feel part of what is happening in their family. A Child Life Specialist can help to explain medical events and provide support during a visit.

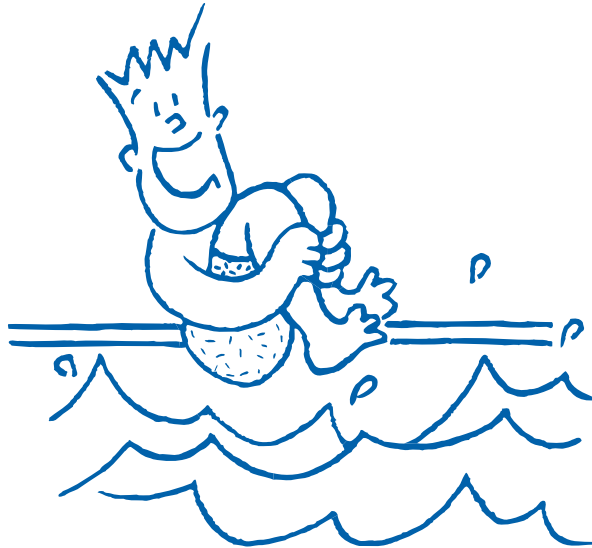
If a visit is not possible, explain to your other children in simple words why their brother or sister is in the hospital and that the doctors and nurses are doing everything they can to get their sibling home as soon as possible. Reassure them that all the feelings they may be having – anger, jealousy, fear or guilt – are okay. Encourage activities which allow your children to express feelings, such as playing doctor or nurse. Working and talking together as a family will help everyone feel more positive about this and any future medical experiences.

Call Us If You Need Us

Helping your child have a smooth transition from being in the hospital to being home again is important to us. If you have more specific questions about your child's visit to ACH and their feelings about hospitals and health care, please call the Child Life and Education Department at 364-1412.



Homecoming: Helping Your Child Cope After a Hospital Stay



Arkansas Children's Hospital
800 Marshall Street
Little Rock, Arkansas 72202

www.archildrens.org

PEC#: C0524.8.9



Arkansas Children's Hospital



changing children's lives