

Supporting children when a loved one is hospitalized



During times of uncertainty, making a visit to see a loved one in the hospital may not be possible. Here are some ways to help children understand and cope with this tough situation.

Who should talk to a child about their loved one being hospitalized?

- Someone the child knows and trusts like a family member or a caregiver.

How should you approach the conversation?

- It is important to be honest and upfront. Kids should be given information as soon as possible so they do not hear incorrect or false information.

How should you communicate with a child about this?

- Speak in a calm voice.
- Use honest and age appropriate words – explain in simple terms.
- Talk about why their loved one is at the hospital. Here are some talking points:
 - “Since your loved one doesn’t feel well enough to be home right now, the hospital is the best place for them to be.”
 - “Doctors and nurses are the experts are taking care of sick people and they are doing a great job taking care of your mom, dad, grandparent, sibling, etc.”
 - “To help keep them safe we don’t want to bring germs to the hospital.”
 - “Your loved one is sick and doesn’t want to share the sick germs with you, so we have to be apart right now.”



Children's Hospital
New Orleans
LCMC Health

What can you do to help?

- Acknowledge the child's feelings
- Reassure them that it is okay to feel what they are feeling.
- Allow for the opportunity to ask questions.
- Prepare them for next steps if necessary.
- It is important to remind children that they did not cause the illness or injury.
 - Developmentally, kids sometimes may think it is their fault. They may think that their loved one became ill because they misbehaved or caused this to happen in some way.



Other ways you can help:

- Children will often communicate through play. Provide them with supplies and activities to express their feelings, worries, or questions. Give them opportunities to play, draw, create art, write, etc.
- Set up regular phone calls, or virtual visits on Facetime or through Zoom, etc.
- Allow the child to communicate with their hospitalized loved one through letters or by drawing pictures that can be sent back and forth.
 - Become pen pals, ask questions, share stories, etc. Make it fun!
- Share pictures.
 - Include photos of medical staff smiling, or doing something fun, show the child that the hospital is not a scary place.
- Use a voice recording to send a message or read a favorite story to the child or the child can do the same to send to the adult in the hospital.
- Choose a special item of the hospitalized loved one that the child can hold on to. (Make sure this item is safe, durable, and age appropriate for the child.)
- Choose a piece of clothing from your loved one in the hospital that has their scent and make it a comfort item like a pillow or stuffed animal for the child. You can do the same for the adult too!
- Make a "hug" by tracing the loved one's hands onto paper, and then cutting them out. You can decorate the hands or write messages to your loved one. Measure a piece of string so that it is as long as your arms, from fingertip to fingertip. Attach the string ends to the paper hands. Now you have a "hug" that you can send to the hospital or share with a family member.

Visit chnola.org/school-wellness for additional COVID-19 resources for parents and kids.

