

# Preparing Your Child For A Hospital Stay

## Infants

- **What You Need to Know**
  - Infants gain a sense of trust with caregivers who provide consistent care and nurturing.
  - Sensory experiences allow infants to learn about their environment (sight, sounds, smell, taste and touch).
  - Infants do not have abstract thinking or reasoning to understand why they are in the hospital. However, they are aware they are not in their home, as the hospital has different sights, sounds, and smells.
- **How You Can Help**
  - Bring a favorite item or comfort objects from home to promote a calm and soothing environment
  - Allow older infants to explore medical equipment. This will promote comfort. Ideas include playing a game of peek-a-boo, using an anesthesia mask or allowing the child to touch a stethoscope or blood pressure cuff

## Toddlers

- **What You Need to Know**
  - Toddlers are learning how to explore their environment. They are starting to gain a sense of control over it.
- **How You Can Help**
  - Prepare your toddler for admission or surgery no more than 1-2 days ahead of time. Toddlers do not understand time.
  - Use simple and concrete words. Toddlers have trouble understanding why they are going to the hospital.
  - Focus on sensory (sight, sound, smell) descriptions of what will happen in the hospital.
  - Bring a favorite item or comfort objects from home. Ideas include a favorite toy, familiar music, or a preferred blanket.
  - Read books about going to the hospital such as “Franklin Goes to the Hospital”

## Pre-school age

- **What You Need to Know**
  - Preschoolers have a very active and wild imagination. Often times, preschoolers have trouble understanding the difference between real and make-believe.
- **How You Can Help**
  - Prepare your preschooler for admission or surgery no more than 2-4 days ahead of time.
  - Focus on sensory (sight, sound, smell) descriptions of what will happen in the hospital.

- Bring a favorite item or comfort objects from home. Ideas include a favorite toy, familiar music, or preferred blanket
- Read books about going to the hospital such as “Franklin Goes to the Hospital”
- Use simple and concrete words. Children at this age are literal thinkers. They do not understand cause and effect. For example a preschooler may feel as if the hospital admission is his or her fault because he or she was “bad” or mean to a sibling
- Allow the child choice when possible such as helping to pack their bag or selecting which toys to bring

## School-age

- **What You Need to Know**
  - School age children are learning how to meet expectations and standards set by others. Social interactions determine how school-age children view themselves. Children compare themselves with their peers.
- **How You Can Help**
  - Prepare your child at least 1 week before the hospital admission or surgery.
  - Focus on sensory (sight, smell, sound) descriptions of what will happen in the hospital
  - Bring a favorite item or comfort objects from home. Ideas include a favorite toy, familiar music, or preferred blanket
  - Read books about going to the hospital
  - Use simple and concrete words to help avoid misconceptions
  - Older school age children are developing abstract thinking. This helps them better understand why they are being admitted to the hospital. Encourage the child to explain why they are going to the hospital in their own words. Allow lots of time for questions
  - Allow the child choice when possible such as helping to pack their bag or selecting which comfort items to bring
  - If possible, provide an opportunity for your child to speak with a peer who has visited the hospital or has had the same experience
  - Focus on the order of events, such as who the child will meet and where they will go

## Adolescents

- **What You Need to Know**
  - Teens are learning to be independent, becoming more involved in decision making and have a focus on developing self-identity.
- **How You Can Help**
  - Provide at least a week or more of preparation to allow for your teen to process planned hospital admission or surgery
  - Try to include teen in decision making offering control as much as possible
  - Offer honest, clear, concise information
  - Encourage teen to direct questions to medical staff
  - Offer privacy when able
  - Encourage questions
  - Include friends or peers (when able) to help teen stay connected
  - Encourage comfort items from home
  - Prepare teen for the order of events once they are admitted