Supporting Your Child
When They Are In The Hospital

Infants

Children this age gain a sense of trust with caregivers who provide constant care and nurturing. If they do not get this, they will learn to mistrust their caregiver. This is a time of learning mostly through the use of their senses (sight, sounds, smell, taste and touch).

- **Your Infant May**
    - Be fussy due to a change in their normal routine
    - React quickly to pain
    - Show a fear of strangers starting around 6 months
    - Be sensitive to surroundings (lights, noises, multiple caregivers)

- **How You Can Help**
    - Use a comforting touch, pacifier or other soothing items from home
    - Keep routines as much as possible, including sleep and feeding
    - Play and read to your child

Toddlers

Toddlers are learning to be more independent and how to make right versus wrong choices. They are learning self-control.

- **Your Toddler May**
    - Show fear when away from caregivers
    - Show fear around people they do not know
    - React quickly to pain
    - Have a hard time getting used to the unfamiliar hospital environment
    - Regress in thinking, behaviors, or loss of newly learned skills

- **How You Can Help**
    - Keep routines and involve people your toddler knows when possible
    - Provide structure and limits
    - Provide choices to give your toddler control and independence
    - Play and read to your child

Pre-schoolers

Preschoolers have a very active imagination. Sometimes they have a hard time learning the difference between real and make-believe. Preschoolers may be able to mimic medical words but do not understand them.

- **Your Preschooler May**
    - Show fear around people they do not know
    - Show fear when away from their caregivers
    - Not understand medical procedures (may think the worst)
    - Believe they did something wrong which is why they are in the hospital.

NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S
When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.℠

- o May express feelings through behaviors or play including: regressing, change in sleep patterns, need for comfort and reassurance, and clingy or attention seeking behaviors
- **How You Can Help**
    - o Keep routines and involve people your preschooler knows when possible
    - o Provide structure and limits
    - o Provide comfort and reassurance. Explain what is going on in words your child can understand
    - o Provide praise and encouragement
    - o Play with your child and allow them to play what they choose
    - o Provide choices to give your preschooler control and independence

School-agers

School age children are learning how to compete and cooperate with others. They are also learning how to meet the expectations and standards set by others.

- **Your School-Ager May**
    - o Have a fear of pain, procedures and of not waking up after procedures
    - o Have misunderstanding of what is happening based on personal, family members or peer experiences with being in the hospital or medical care
    - o Have separation concerns related to the change in their daily life such as missing school and sports and being away from their friends
    - o Have modesty concerns
    - o Regress in thinking, behaviors, or loss of newly learned skills
- **How You Can Help**
    - o Provide information about the hospital in words your child can understand
    - o Allow lots of time for your child to ask questions
    - o Bring favorite items, games and comfort resources (pillow or blanket)
    - o Encourage peer interaction, self-expression, and continued learning
    - o Offer choices when able
    - o Promote privacy

Teens

Teens are learning independent decision-making and self-concept. They are concerned with body image, privacy and peer relationships.

- **Your Teen May**
    - o Have a fear of being in pain. They may also fear unknowns related to their treatment.
    - o Have fear from being away from peers and loss of social/school status
    - o Concern for body image and privacy
    - o May have a hard time controlling their emotions
    - o Regress in thinking, behaviors, or loss of newly learned skills
- **How You Can Help**
    - o Include your teen as member of the treatment team and decision making
    - o Allow lots of time for your teen to ask questions and listen to what they have to say
    - o Encourage peer interaction, self-expression, and continued learning
    - o Promote privacy

NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S
When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.℠