

Let's Talk About...

Helping Your Toddler (1 to 3 Years) Cope With Being in the Hospital

A hospital stay can be a stressful time for toddlers. At home, children this age are busy learning new words, potty training, and becoming more independent. Being in the hospital can seem scary or limiting since they can't explore their environment as often or in the same ways they are used to. You can improve your toddler's experience by using some of the tips in this handout and by talking with your healthcare team about the best ways to speak with and support your child.

What are common reasons toddlers feel stress in the hospital?

The hospital may be an unfamiliar place that's outside your toddler's comfort zone. A stay in the hospital may involve:

- Changes in routine (like sleep and eating patterns)
- Seeing or interacting with more people than they are used to
- Sudden or loud noises
- Loss of control and independence
- Difficulty expressing thoughts and feelings due to limited vocabulary
- Separation from parents and family
- Being unable to move and explore as often as they like



What are signs your toddler could be under stress?

Watch for clues such as:

- Excessive fear
- Crying
- Increase in the number of tantrums
- Regression (not using skills they have already learned)
- Seeking more comfort from parents or family
- Trouble sleeping
- Changes to eating patterns
- Less interest in normal activities

How can you support your toddler?

You can help your toddler lower their stress levels and feel more comfortable by:

- Maintaining a simple daily schedule with room for flexibility
- Offering choices when possible
- Bringing comfort items from home
- Reading to help them learn new words
- Providing step by step preparation for hospital experiences
- Talking with your care team about the best way to speak with and support your child
- Being present with your child, participating in their care as often as possible, and using simple and short explanations when describing what to expect
- Allowing them to safely explore their environment and providing play activities

What techniques can you use to comfort your toddler?

If you sense your child is under stress, you can try:

- Singing and talking with them
- Acknowledging their feelings and offering support
- Using bubbles and toys to help them play
- Allowing them to carry something special with them
- Reducing the number of people at a time in their hospital room
- Giving them choices when possible

Questions for my healthcare team

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