

Let's Talk About...

Helping Your School-Age Child (5 to 12 years) Cope with Being in the Hospital

School-age children tend to love to learn, try new things, and look for ways to feel accomplished. Friends are becoming more important and they often look for ways to please others. During this time, it is important to build their self-esteem by allowing more opportunities to feel independent and complete tasks on their own. You can improve your child'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 school age children feel stress in the hospital?

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

- Separation from parents and family
- Changes in routine (like sleep and eating patterns)
- Loss of choice and independence
- Fear of bodily harm and loss of bodily function
- Fear of the unknown
- Being away from friends and family
- Being away from school and normal activities
- Lack of privacy
- Less opportunity for choice and control
- Lack of predictability
- Increase in the number of people they interact with
- Being more self-conscious



What are signs your child could be under stress?

Watch for clues, such as:

- Regression (not using skills they have already learned)
- Expressing feelings in a different way (tantrums, crying, acting out, withdrawn)
- Guilt
- Lack of trust
- Less interest in normal activities
- Frustration because they are not able to participate in school and normal activities
- Isolation
- Embarrassment or being more self-conscious

