

Let's Talk About...

Helping Your Teenager (13 to 18 years) Cope with Being in the Hospital

Teenagers tend to be fun, active, and are continually looking for ways to learn and grow. They show their independence through their choices and activities. They love to socialize with their friends and often worry about what other people think. In the hospital setting, teenagers may struggle with loss of control, lack of privacy, self-doubt, independence, and less opportunities to socialize with family and friends. Below you will find some suggestions on how to best support your teenager.

What are common reasons teenagers feel stress in the hospital?

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

- Loss of choice and independence
- Concern about the future
- Lack of privacy
- Body image issues
- Being away from school and friends
- Restriction of physical activities
- Misconceptions about hospital and healthcare
- Not being included in medical conversations
- Fears of rejection
- Concerns about being different



What are signs your teenager could be under stress?

Watch for clues, such as:

- Anger and defensiveness (defending themselves or blaming others)
- Feeling withdrawn or more emotional than usual
- Being uncooperative
- Trying to gain control in unhealthy ways (refusing to take medicine or not answering questions)
- Acting out
- Less interest in normal activities
- Hesitant to express feelings or emotions
- Rebellious behavior



How can you support your teenager?

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

- Engaging in open and honest communication
- Providing honest explanations for the preparation of procedures and treatments
- Involving them in their medical care and decision making
- Giving them choices and control when possible
- Advocating for their privacy when possible (keeping the curtain closed, having them wear their own pajamas, shutting their door)
- Encouraging friends to visit
- Helping them explore their interests
- Bringing items and activities from home
- Helping them find ways to express themselves
- Maintaining connection with their school
- Video chatting or spending time with family and friends

How can you help comfort your teenager?

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

- Telling jokes and sharing laughter with one another
- Practicing deep breathing and guided imagery to find peaceful images in their mind
- Listening to music
- Practicing art together, such as drawing and coloring
- Helping decorate their room to reflect their interests
- Helping them find ways to be independent in the hospital
- Encouraging them to express their emotions, both good and bad
- Asking what would help them to feel more comfortable during their hospital stay
- Validating their feelings and concerns
- Helping them recognize what they are doing well

Questions for my healthcare team

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