

Preparing Siblings when a brother or sister is having surgery:

When your child goes to the hospital, brothers and sisters may feel afraid, worried or confused. They will also have to deal with being away from one or both parents, missing their brother or sister, or having to stay with other family or friends. The following are some of the common feelings siblings may have during this time:

- **Being Lonely**
They miss having their brother or sister to play with, and their parents around to care for and comfort them.
- **Being Left Alone**
If they are not told about what is happening, brothers and sisters may feel like they are not important. They may worry about who will take care of them and may assume their needs will not be met. Who will feed them? Who will make sure they get to and from school? Who will make sure they are safe at home?
- **Jealousy**
Brothers and sisters often wish that they were the ones getting all the attention or presents from family and friends, and become resentful and/or jealous of their sibling.
- **Guilt**
Siblings may feel bad for having mean thoughts about their brother or sister, or may even feel like it is their fault their brother or sister is in the hospital. They might feel guilty for being healthy, when their brother or sister is ill.
- **Fear**
They may think they can “catch” something from the sick brother or sister. They may be afraid the sick child will not eat well or will not ever come home.

How do I prepare my other children for their sibling’s surgery?

- Include siblings in conversations about their brother’s/sister’s surgery- in words they can understand.
- Make sure your children know why their brother/sister is going to the hospital.
- Make sure brothers and sisters know that some other responsible adult will be caring for them during the time you have to be at the hospital, and that you will come back as soon as you can.
- Try to set aside private time for you and your children at home so that they can get some special attention.
- Read books about going to the hospital with the entire family.
- Give many compliments and hugs. Take extra time to notice good schoolwork or jobs done at home.

How will children at home show they are stressed?

The following are the most common signs that a child is under stress. However, each child may display signs of stress differently. Signs may include:

- Eating Changes (eating less than usual, eating more than usual, or being picky about what he/she will eat)
- Not wanting to talk or be with family members
- “Too Good” behavior
- Need for a lot of hugs and attention
- Doing things to get in trouble and get attention
- Saying they feel sick too

How can I help the siblings at home?

- Let the child at home know that it is acceptable to be afraid and to cry.
- Tell the truth when you answer your children’s questions, however, keep in mind to use simple explanations your child can understand.
- Keep care routines at home as normal as you can.
- Have your children at home draw pictures or make cards to send to the hospital.
- Set up times for your children to talk to each other on the phone or to visit (check with your Child Life Specialist about the possibility for a visit)
- Do not be afraid to ask family and friends for help. Simply your life as much as possible. Remaining positive and calm can help the entire family.

Books for Siblings about surgery and hospital visits:

- When Molly was in the Hospital: A Book for Brothers and Sisters of Hospitalized Children by Debbie Duncan.
- Let’s Talk About When Someone You Love is in the Hospital by Marianne Johnson.