



This family education sheet explains how to support your other child or children when their sibling is in the hospital.

Key points

- Be open and honest with your child, in an age-appropriate way.
- Keep daily routines as normal as possible.
- Encourage your child to connect with their hospitalized sibling.

Sometimes, when a child in a family has health challenges, their siblings may have many feelings such as sadness, worry, anger, jealousy or guilt. It's normal for children to experience a variety of feelings when they have a sibling who is hospitalized or has special health needs. Validating (confirming) your child's feelings is a great place to begin.

How can I tell how my child is feeling?

Children often don't know how to talk about the way they're feeling and may internalize their emotions. Children may express themselves in different ways depending on their developmental age. You can sometimes see this in their behaviors. Some examples include:

- A change in eating habits
- Difficulty in school or overachieving in school
- "Regressing" or engaging in younger behaviors
- Trying very hard to please or protect their parents or other grown-ups
- Acting out by not listening, fighting or even hitting others
- Seeking more affection than usual
- Physical symptoms like being or sick or having a stomachache
- "Risky" behaviors (older children)

How can I support my child?

Being open and honest with your child allows them to have trust in you as their caregiver and get rid of any misconceptions. Children can sense when there are changes in their environment and family and it's important to include them in an age-appropriate way.

- Talk as a family in an environment that's safe and distraction-free (consider the time of day and try not to have these talks right before bed).
- Give simple and honest explanations at your child's developmental level.

- Provide something concrete or comforting during difficult transitions, like a stuffed animal.
- Encourage your child to talk about their feelings by labelling and validating them. Let your child know it's OK to have many different feelings and to cry, be angry or be happy.
- Keep daily routines and predictability as normal as possible, such as school attendance, meals, naps, bedtime, etc.
- Give your non-hospitalized child special attention whenever possible.
- Participate in self-care practices as a caregiver to model healthy coping strategies.
- Find ways to include your child in their sibling's hospitalization.

How can I help my child connect with their hospitalized sibling?

- Draw pictures to hang in their room.
- Video chat.
- Write a letter or story that can be read to their sibling.
- Pick out pictures of family to put on the wall.
- Choose your hospitalized child's favorite books. Bring these to hospital and "read" via video chat with your child at home.
- Create an "All About Me" (including siblings' knowledge of their sibling) or "All About Our Family."
- In order to stay connected, some children choose an item that both they and their sibling have. You can encourage your child to pick out a stuffed animal or other comfort item that a caregiver can bring to the hospital.
- Send a hug: outstretched arms on a piece of paper or hand tracings connected by a ribbon (if that's safe for child).
- Create a playlist for their sibling's room.
- Read books specifically about having a hospitalized sibling.
- Talk to your child's Child Life specialist about creating a sibling story.

What books might help my child?

Books about feelings

- [The Color Monster: A Story About Emotions](#) By: Anna LLenas
- [My Many Colored Days](#) By: Dr. Seuss
- [The Feelings Book](#) By: Todd Parr
- [The Way I Feel](#) By: Janan Cain

Books about separation

- [Don't Worry Bear](#) By: Greg Foley
- [The Invisible](#) String By: Patrice Karst (Workbook as well)
- [When I Miss You](#) By: Cornelia Maude Spelman
- [In My Heart](#) By: Jo Witek

Books about having a sibling with special health care needs

- [The Sibling Slam Book: What It's Really Like to Have a Brother or Sister with Special Needs](#) By: Don Meyer
- [When Molly was in the Hospital: A Book for Brothers and Sisters of Hospitalized Children](#) By: Debbie Duncan and Nina Ollikainen
- [Noah's Garden: When Someone you Love is in the Hospital](#) By: Mo Johnson
- [What About Me? When Brothers and Sisters Get Sick](#) By: Allan Peterkin and Frances Middendorf
- [Views from Our Shoes: Growing up with a Brother or Sister with Special Needs](#) By: Don Meyer and Cary Pillo

How can I support my child who is older?

If your child is older, open the door for communication. You may want to use tools to help them process what's happening, such as journaling, music, creative arts, social interactions with peers and physical activity.

Talk with your Child Life specialist for support and guidance on the coping needs of your children.