

Supporting Children When a Family Member is Hospitalized with Covid-19

When families experience stress and change, children of all ages may struggle to adjust and cope. This can be especially true of children who have a family member hospitalized due to Covid-19. With limited hospital visitation, this can be an increasingly stressful situation for families.

Your child may experience a range of emotions:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling “numb” or feeling nothing”
- Physical symptoms such as Head-aches or stomach-aches
- Feeling lonely
- Sudden or unexpected feelings of anger or sadness
- Difficulty sleeping
- A desire to get away from everyone and everything
- Feeling overwhelmed
- A wide range of all types of emotions: sadness, anger, confusion, fear, shock.

Ways to Help Children Deal with Stress and Change

Be honest. Provide accurate and honest information to children about the person who is ill using simple concrete language. If they are not informed by a trusted source, children may use their imagination to fill in information they lack. You can say “Your uncle has an illness called Coronavirus, and his lungs are having a hard time working correctly. The doctors and nurses at the hospital are working hard to help him feel better soon. We aren’t able to visit him in the hospital because we want to keep the rest of our family healthy.”

You are the best role model. Allow children to see your emotions. If they see you cry, they know it is okay for them to cry. You can explain, “Mommy is really sad today because she does not want your uncle to be sick. Sometimes when I am sad, I cry. When I feel sad, listening to music can help me feel better.” This can open the door for you to talk about what comforts your child when they are upset.

Include the children. When a family member is hospitalized it can alter family dynamics and leave children feeling uncertain. As much as you can, help children understand what will happen and who will take care of them if you or another parent must be away from home. Try to keep caregivers and routines as consistent and familiar as possible.

Encourage connection. Provide opportunities for children to video chat, text, or talk with the loved one who is ill. Writing cards or letters to the person may be helpful as well.

Be available. Provide appropriate updates as you are able, so the child feels in the loop with what is happening. Let children know you are available to try to answer any questions they have. By providing intentional time for conversation regarding the ill family member, you communicate to the child that you can help them through this time.

Allow for full range of emotions and encourage play. Remember just as you feel many different emotions, children are experiencing the same. Give them opportunities to express those feelings and cope in safe, healthy ways. Active and/or creative play can help children of all ages express their feelings in appropriate ways.