

Help your child cope

Being at the hospital can be hard for children of all ages. It is a new place with new people, and there may be scary tests or painful procedures. Your child may be more worried about going to the doctor or hospital. One way to help is to use medical play at home.

What is medical play?

This type of play helps children to explore and get to know medical supplies in a playful way. This can help them feel more in control. Children often do not know how to tell you how they feel. Instead, they can show it during play. This play can help you learn what your child fears or does not understand.

How can parents do medical play at home?

- **Play with a pretend doctor's kit.** Your child can use a stuffed animal, doll, or toy as the patient. This may help them express their feelings.
- **Make an art project** with medical supplies. Try band aids, tongue depressors, gauze, cotton swabs, syringes, or medical tape to make art. Color and paint with them.
- **Use medical supplies in playful ways.** Use them as Play Doh® tools. Use syringes to squirt water in the bathtub.

Keys to success:

- **Observe.** Watch how your child plays. Listen to what they are saying. You can learn how they understand what happened at the hospital and what their fears are. If they are pretending that a toy is the patient, ask them, "Tell me how that made your patient feel?"
- **Let your child share their feelings freely.** Try not to judge, or correct their feelings. Try not to say things like, "Oh, that didn't hurt!" or "That wasn't scary." Every child has their own version of events and feelings.
- **Don't ask too many questions or tell them how to play.** Let them have control. Let them play their way. It's ok if they are not using the supplies the right way or are being rough (as long as they are still safe).
- **Gently redirect your child's misunderstandings.** For example, your child may say that the nurse is trying to hurt the patient. Try saying, "I know that getting a shot hurts, but it helps our bodies get the medicine we need. The nurse wants the patient to stay healthy or feel better."

Child Life Specialists help children and teens cope with being in the hospital. They help teach and prepare your child using distraction and play. If you feel your child needs Child Life support while at the hospital, talk to your care team.

This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.