Helping children and teens when a loved one is ill

This table will give you a general overview of what your child may be feeling and how you can help.

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<th>Age</th>
<th>Common reactions</th>
<th>What you can do to help</th>
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| Infants and Toddlers | ▪ Change in eating or sleeping patterns  
▪ Fussiness  
▪ Trouble being away from caregivers | ▪ Try to keep up routines and be consistent.  
▪ Give lots of hugging and cuddling. |
| Ages Birth to Two    |                                                                                  |                                                                                       |
| Preschool Ages 3-5   | ▪ Change in eating or sleeping patterns  
▪ Behavior is more baby-like. (May start sucking thumb or have setbacks in toilet training)  
▪ More fears | ▪ Try to keep routines and structure.  
▪ Be consistent.  
▪ Assure them they did not cause the illness.  
▪ Explain what is happening in simple terms.  
▪ Give them chances to ask questions.  
▪ Give choices when possible. |
| School Age Ages 5-12 | ▪ Trouble being away from caregivers. Return to behaviors they had outgrown  
▪ Complain about physical problems  
▪ Irritable or angry  
▪ Trouble with change | ▪ Reassure them that they will be taken care of.  
▪ Explain what is happening to the best of your ability.  
▪ Give choices when possible.  
▪ Offer lots of times to ask questions |
| Adolescents Ages 13 and up | ▪ Anger, withdrawal, physical complaints  
▪ Concern about being different  
▪ May have poor judgment or rebel  
▪ May turn feelings inward | ▪ Give chances to listen and talk.  
▪ Encourage peer support.  
▪ Allow him or her to express feelings in a safe way. |
Suggestions for all ages

- Be honest. Your children need to know they can trust you during this difficult time.

- Keep the lines of communication open. Keep children informed as things change. Ask questions to see how much your child understands.

- Prepare your child for visits to the hospital.

- Keep routines and be consistent. Have your children stay in their own home if possible.

- Reassure children that nothing they did caused this illness.

- Tell them that Mom or Dad (or caregiver) is sick. Tell them the name of the illness. Tell them your best understanding of what will happen.

- Remember that it is okay to not know all the answers. Reassure your child that you will let them know what is happening as soon as you find out.

If you have questions...

- Have your nurse contact the Child Life Specialists. They are trained to help children and families cope while at the hospital.