Support your young child during hospitalization

- Children cope better in the presence of a familiar adult.
- Talk to your baby or young child about his or her feelings; for example, “You got a little scared when the doctor checked your tummy.”
- When medically possible, provide skin-to-skin contact to help your baby regulate and become calmer through you.
- If you need to leave, let your child know and alert the nurse. It is best for your child to be prepared.
- If you leave, give your child something that reminds him or her of you—for a baby, an item with your smell; for an older child, a picture.
- Maintain open communication with your child’s health care providers.

Did you know?

- Babies remember even when they are very young.
- They may cry for no apparent reason because their bodies remember.
- Sights, sounds and smells can be reminders. These can trigger:
  - Nightmares or startled sleep
  - Increased clinginess or separation anxiety
  - Fussy or uncooperative behavior
  - Re-enacting experiences through play

Remember …

Recovery and improved physical health are related to reducing stress. The relationship you have with your child is the best way to protect your child from stress. Be sure to take care of your child by taking care of yourself, too.

For additional support, please contact your trusted health care provider for a referral for services.

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Visit CHLA.org/UCEDD for more information.
Hospitals can be stressful for young children. Your loving relationship is the key.

Having a young child with serious medical issues can be stressful and traumatic for the child and family. Young children show stress through their behavior. Some children may cry, scream and refuse to cooperate, while others may withdraw, appear lethargic or disengage from their loved ones or the things that usually make them happy. During this time, it is important to be patient with your child and yourself. Your love and care can go a long way in helping your child.

Stress in the hospital can be caused by:
- Painful procedures
- Being left alone
- Seeing blood or injuries
- Being immobilized
- Medical equipment
- Unfamiliar smells or sounds
- Changes and unpredictable routines

Know the signs of stress. Your child may:
- Arch his or her back
- Sleep more than usual
- Spit up
- Turn his or her head away
- Have excessive irritability or crying
- Be easily startled
- Refuse to cooperate

Supporting your young child at the hospital

Prepare yourself first:
- Learn about the medical procedures your child will have. Getting yourself ready mentally can help you prepare your child.
- Breathe and try to relax. Babies and young children are very sensitive to their caregiver’s cues and will feel the tension in your body.
- Seek support from friends and family. Try to protect your child from your stress.

Prepare your child:
- Talk to your baby in a soothing voice. Explain what the doctors or nurses will do and that they are trying to help. Babies understand in their own way.
- Remind your child that you are there and want to help. For example, “The nurse is going to poke your arm to take out some blood. It’s going to hurt a little bit. I will hold you and help you.”
- Allow your child to hold on to a comforting toy or blanket. Engage in a comforting activity like singing or looking at a book to help your child focus on you during the medical procedure.