

Supporting Children: When an Adult is in the Hospital

Everyone faces their own emotions, situations and struggles when a loved one is in the hospital. It may be more complicated when children are involved. They might choose not to (or cannot) visit the hospital. They may feel left out or like they did something wrong when they are not allowed to visit. Explaining the situation honestly and encouraging connection from afar can help children cope with not being able to visit their adult in person.

Giving clear explanations

How to explain why a child cannot visit

- › “Your loved one would love to see you, but hospitals have rules that do not allow children to visit. This is because they are trying to stop people from getting sick.”
- › “I want you to know you will not be able to see this person while they are in the hospital. Hospitals help lots of people, and it’s important for them to keep everyone safe from extra germs. This is why they have special rules about people visiting. You may not be able to visit the hospital, but we can talk about other ways you can stay in touch.”

To help connect with the child

- › Ask your child if they want to make pictures, cards or signs for their loved one’s hospital room.
- › If possible and appropriate, ask your child if they want to talk to their loved one over the phone or a video call.
- › If possible and appropriate, take some photos or videos of the hospital room to share.

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- › If able, record their loved one’s voice reading their favorite story, singing their bedtime song or doing another comforting activity.
 - › If able, the child and their loved one can be “pen pals.”

To help the child cope

- › Keep routines as normal as possible. Routines can help children feel more secure and in control.
- › Check in with the child to see how they are feeling and ask if they have any questions. Writing down questions can be helpful. Having these conversations while doing a craft or coloring can feel supportive for the child, too.

If you need support talking about the hospital to children, you can email a child life specialist at [**NMHChildLife@nm.org**](mailto:NMHChildLife@nm.org).