

Your child in the hospital

a stressful event

Your child has been admitted to the hospital. A hospitalization has often far-reaching consequences and can cause stress for parents and children.



Stressful factors can be:

- not knowing what is going to happen, insecurity
 - changes to the child's appearance
- being separated from the familiar surroundings
 - seeing other sick children
- coming into contact with unfamiliar equipment
 - seeing that your child is in pain
 - fear of a bad outcome

common reactions from parents:

- Being anxious or becoming easily upset
- Feeling powerless
- Functioning on auto pilot
- Wanting to stay constantly with the child
- Being overly vigilant or nervous
- Being irritable and not able to take much
- Having trouble sleeping or eating
- Losing track of the situation
- Having trouble concentrating
- Feeling guilty

common reactions from children:

Babies and young children

- Being restless and overly irritated
- Having trouble sleeping or eating
- Being anxious or nervous and becoming easily upset
- Start bedwetting or thumb sucking again

Older children (also previous reactions)

- Being miserable, rebellious or angry
- Isolating oneself or, on the contrary, being more affectionate/clinging
- Feeling alone, missing friends and family
- Being insecure about their looks

These are normal reactions to an abnormal event. And everybody has this reaction to a greater or smaller extent.

how long do these stress reactions last?

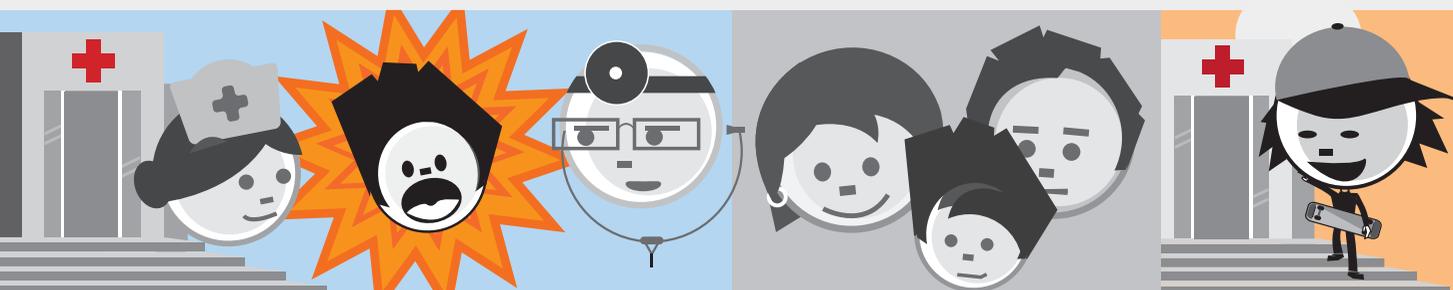
These reactions can last for some days or weeks. As you gain more control over the situation and the latter stabilises, the stress reactions will abate.

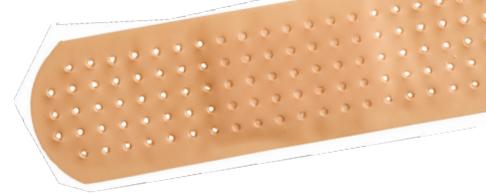
how can you deal with these reactions?

There are things that can help you to reduce stress for yourself or your child. You can find a number of tips for this on the reverse side.

If you need support, discuss this with a nurse or doctor.

They can put you into contact with a social worker or child psychologist.





10 tips for parents in the hospital

1 Look for distraction for your child

You are the best person to reassure and comfort your child. Distract the child, for example by reading a book to him/her or by going to the play room. Often more things are allowed than you think.

IDEA: Talk to your child about something nice when he/she is being injected and compliment your child afterwards

2 Give your child a secure feeling

Let your child know you are there for him/her. Say to your child that you are leaving and when you are coming back. Make the hospital environment as familiar as possible. And tell your child that the people in the hospital have a lot of knowledge and experience to help children get better.

IDEA: Bring a cuddly toy, music, toys or a photograph from home

3 Show understanding

Children can react in various ways such as crying, clinging or getting angry. Accept these reactions from your child. These are normal reactions to an abnormal event. Explain to your child that his/her reaction is understandable.

IDEA: Say for example 'I can well imagine that it is distressing and that you are angry. That is completely normal.'

4 Ensure routine and order

Try to stick to a daily routine and arrange it with the medical staff. This way, the hospital environment becomes more controllable and predictable.

IDEA: Make a day activities programme, for example with an educational worker

5 Increase the feeling of control

Look for ways to give your child as much control as possible of what is happening. Let your child make his/her own choices, even if it concerns only small matters.

IDEA: Let your child choose for example if the injection will be on the left or the right side

6 Provide explanations

Help your child understand what is happening. Answer the questions of your child and give especially factual

information. Children are quick to interpret things themselves and thus get a wrong impression of events. Prevent phantasing, stick to the facts and use simple words.

IDEA: Say for example, that injections hurt, but explain why it is necessary

7 Talking helps

Encourage your child to talk about his or her feelings. Help your child with naming feelings (angry, afraid, happy, sad). It helps young children to express their feelings through play, drawing and by telling stories. Also stimulate contact with friends and classmates.

IDEA: Make a drawing together of things in the hospital

8 Keep taking care of yourself

If you are upset or worried yourself and do not get enough sleep, it is harder to support your child. Try to get sufficient rest and sleep, even if this may be difficult sometimes. Take time to relax. Take the time to go outside once in a while and walk, exercise or read. Do things that make you feel good, even if it is for a short while.

IDEA: Take a daily walk near the hospital

9 Do not hesitate to ask

If something is not clear or if you need information during the hospitalisation, ask for additional explanation or information. It is allowed.

IDEA: Write down questions and plan regular consultations with the medical staff

10 Look for support

Support is important; use the help offered. Or ask for help if you need it. People want to help, but often do not know how. Share your worries with others such as family, friends, church, neighbours or medical staff. Do not bottle up your feelings.

IDEA: Keep a diary or a weblog for example

initiatief:



emma kinderziekenhuis AMC

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your child after the hospital



"I keep seeing my child in the hospital bed"

"I experienced the entire hospitalisation in a haze"

"I often think of the moment that my child all of a sudden stopped breathing"

reactions after admission

Your child was admitted to the hospital. An admission to hospital has often far-reaching consequences. Some parents and children have stress reactions. You can think of frequently thinking about what happened, irritability, no interest in doing anything, physical complaints, having trouble sleeping or concentrating.

how do these reactions come about?

When we feel tension or during a stressful event, our body produces stress hormones. This makes us extra alert and enables us to react quickly. The result is: an increased heartbeat, a rise of blood pressure and tensing muscles. During the hospitalisation, these stress systems remain activated.

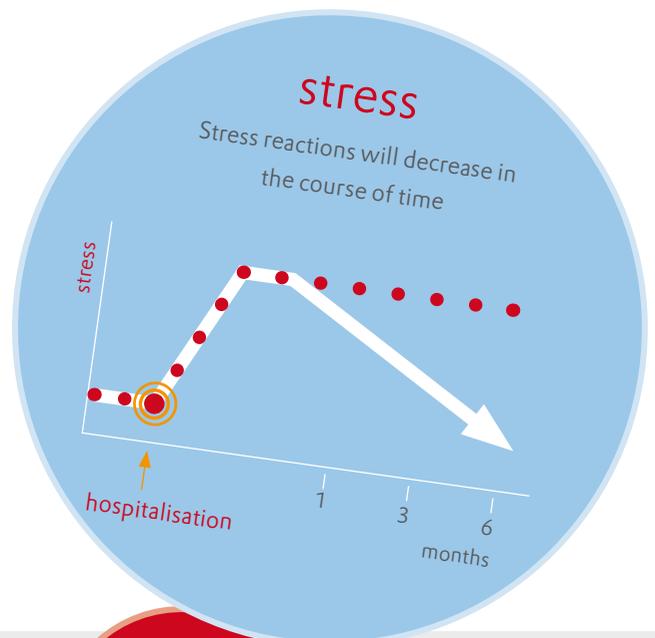
Parents describe for example that, during the hospitalisation, they are functioning on auto pilot. Or that they have experienced the admission in a haze. These are automatic reactions to protect us, so that we can handle the situation.

Stress reactions are normal reactions following a hospitalisation!

if processing is difficult

Parents and children will need time to recover after the hospital. Time to let the stress systems calm down again. With most parents and children the stress reactions will usually disappear by themselves when the situation returns to normal. This is in general after three to six months. Some families even become stronger and closer after that.

However, it may be that, after one month, you have the impression that these reactions do not abate at all. You should then contact a professional (GP, psychologist, social worker). He can help you with the processing. You can find more information on the website.



The hospitalisation was like a roller coaster

please turn over for useful tips

tips



when do I look for help for my child?

If, one month after the hospitalisation, your child:

- no longer wants to go to school or can not keep up anymore
- no longer participates in or enjoys the usual things or
- activities still is excessively anxious, sad or worried
- does not sleep well and does not or hardly eat

and when do I look for help as a parent?

If, one month after the hospitalisation, you:

- still think very frequently about what happened and feel restricted by it
- no longer participate in or enjoy the usual things or activities
- are overly worried about your child
- do not sleep well and do not or hardly eat



tips



10 tips for parents after the hospital

1 Take your time

Everyone reacts differently to what happened. That is normal. Parents and children, as well as brothers and sisters need time to process the hospitalisation. These reactions usually disappear automatically. Accept these reactions of your child and reassure him/her.

IDEA: Say for example 'I can well imagine that you are still angry sometimes, that is no problem at all. It is very normal'

2 Help your child to understand what has happened

Back home, your children may still have many questions. Answer the questions of your child honestly. If you hide things, children will start phantasing about them. Often, this is more harmful than providing an honest answer. Make sure the child can give him-/herself a summary of what happened to others.

IDEA: Let your child kind do a talk in class for example.

3 Stick to a daily routine

Continue as much as possible your normal daily activities (werk, school, hobbies). This may give you the feeling that you control the situation. This is also important for the peace and order within the family.

IDEA: Give your child little tasks in the household that he/she can handle well (for example washing the dishes, walking the dog)

4 Talking helps

Stimulate your child to talk about what happened, but do not force him/her. This can be done in various ways. Drawing, writing and playing (dolls, dressing up clothes, doctor's outfit etc.) may help young children. Choose the method that fits you and your child.

IDEA: be creative, think up a story about the hospital together for example

5 Continue to set boundaries

Some parents find it hard after the hospitalisation to set clear boundaries. The child is given more freedom than before as it has already been through enough. However, this does not help a child. Your child needs something to hold on to. Clear rules and structure offer a child rest and security. Try to stick to the same rules as before.

IDEA: say for example 'You are allowed to be angry, but you do not need to call names'

6 Discuss with the doctor what your child may and may not do.

What is allowed and what not depends on your child's condition when arriving back home. For example going outside, use of medication, sports, going to the day care centre, school etc.

IDEA: Agree on clear rules for living and conduct with your doctor and write them down

7 Look for distraction and support

Looking for distraction by undertaking activities may help your child to focus his/her attention elsewhere. Doing things together with friends and understanding from school is also important to a child.

IDEA: invite a friend to come play again

8 Take care of yourself

Try to get sufficient rest and sleep. Take time for relaxation also. Try to take up again the habits you had to relax/for relaxing. Do fun things with your family.

IDEA: Make a list together of fun things to do

9 Express your own feelings

Often, parents only fully realise at home what has happened. Do not hide your feelings. Talk about your worries with others such as family, friends, church or neighbours.

IDEA: Write down your experiences. Writing helps to compose feelings and thoughts. And it allows to gain a clearer view of the situation.

10 Building trust

It is quite normal that you as a parent, are more concerned and careful with your child after the hospitalisation. But try not to become over-concerned. Trust your child again.

IDEA: Let your child do what he/she can do independently.

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