

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# How to Help Brothers and Sisters of a Sick Child

When your child is sick, your family may go through a lot of change and stress. Brothers and sisters of sick children have special needs, too. No matter what their ages, they feel the changes. Here are some tips on how to help.

## Feelings

Brothers and sisters may have a lot of different feelings that change from day to day. Some of their feelings may be similar to yours. They may feel . . .

### Confusion

- What is happening to my brother or sister?
- What is a hospital, anyway?
- Will my brother or sister die?

### Anger

- Why is the sick child getting all the attention?
- Aren't mom and dad supposed to protect us?

### Fear

- Will I catch it?
- I should be the one who is sick.



**When your child is sick,  
your family may go through  
a lot of change and stress.**

## **Guilt**

- This is all my fault. When we were fighting, I wished he or she would die.

## **Jealousy**

- Why can't I go visit?
- Why am I always left out?
- Mom and dad are never home anymore. They must not love me as much as my brother or sister.

## **The brother or sister needs help if he or she:**

- talks less than usual, is withdrawn
- strong outbursts of feelings, like anger or fear
- acts out to get attention
- eating more or less than usual
- having trouble sleeping
- returning to habits he or she outgrew, such as sucking thumb or bedwetting.
- lower grades in school



**The brother or sister needs help if he or she is withdrawn.**



**Talk to each of your children every day.**

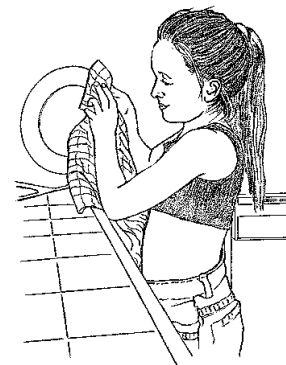
## **What you can do:**

- Talk to each of your children every day.
  - Tell your children you love them, and that you will be there for them.
  - Tell them where you are, how you can be reached and when you will come home.
  - Talk about the illness. Be honest.
  - Encourage your children to ask questions and express feelings.
  - Tell your children it's OK to cry or feel upset. Tell them they may see adults feeling upset, too.
  - Give simple, honest answers.



**Encourage your children to ask questions and express feelings.**

- **Let brothers and sisters visit the hospital.** When they see where the sick child is, they will understand more. Before the visit, tell brothers and sisters what they will see, hear and smell at the hospital. Use easy words. Some medical terms are too hard to understand. Encourage your children to ask questions and express feelings.
- **Keep communication open between brothers and sisters.** Your children can draw pictures for each other, and share photos. They can write or tape record letters, stories or songs to each other.
- **Spend time with each of your children.** Focus on their special needs. Ask children where they would like to go or what they would like to do, and do it together.
- **Keep routines as normal as possible.** Send children to regular day care or school. Don't change bedtime or times of meals.
- **Keep your usual family rules.** Do not loosen rules out of guilt or trying to be nice. Rules help children feel loved and cared for. Rules help children feel comfortable because rules help children know what to expect. When rules stay the same, children feel safe.
- **Find ways to let your children help the sick child.** They can help pack the suitcase. They can draw pictures to decorate the room.
- **If you must be away and cannot be with your children, help them know you will come back.**
  - Ask them to keep a special item of yours until you return, like a piece of jewelry or clothing.
  - Send the child a new piece to a puzzle every day.
  - Read a story into a tape recorder and send the tape to your child.
- **Ask your nurse, social worker, or doctor about sibling support groups.**



**Keep routines as normal as possible.**

## If you want to learn more, look for these books in your library:

- Amadeo, D. (2005). My Baby Sister is a Premie. Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation.
- Cain, B. S. (1990). Double-Dip Feelings: Stories to Help Children Understand Emotions. NY: Magination Press.
- Dodd, M. (2004). Oliver's Story: For Sibs of Kids with Cancer. Washington, DC: Candelighters Foundation.
- Duncan, D. (1994). When Molly Was in the Hospital: A Book for Brothers and Sisters of Hospitalized Children. Rayve Productions.
- Thompson, M. (1992). My Brother Matthew. Rockville, MD: Woodbine.

If you want to talk to someone about how to help your children cope, tell your child's nurse you want to talk to the Child Life Specialist or Social Worker.

## Now that you've read this:

- ☐ Tell your nurse, doctor, child life specialist, or social worker how you will help your children cope. (Check when done.)



If you have any questions or concerns,

- ☐ call your child's doctor or ☐ call \_\_\_\_\_

If you want to know more about child health and illness,  
visit our library at The Emily Center at Phoenix Children's Hospital

1919 East Thomas Road

Phoenix, AZ 85016

602-933-1400

[www.phoenixchildrens.org](http://www.phoenixchildrens.org)

Facebook: [facebook.com/theemilycenter](https://facebook.com/theemilycenter)

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866-933-6459

[www.theemilycenter.org](http://www.theemilycenter.org)

Twitter: [@emilycenter](https://twitter.com/emilycenter)

### Disclaimer

The information provided at this site is intended to be general information, and is provided for educational purposes only. It is not intended to take the place of examination, treatment, or consultation with a physician. Phoenix Children's Hospital urges you to contact your physician with any questions you may have about a medical condition.

Thursday, July 3, 2014 • DRAFT in family review

#125 • Written by Teresa Boeger, MS, CTRS, CCLS and Patti Deppe, CTRS, CCLS

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## How to Help Brothers and Sisters of a Sick Child

Name of Health Care Provider: \_\_\_\_\_

Date returned: \_\_\_\_\_ ☐ db

### Family Review of Handout

Health care providers: Please teach families with this handout.

Families: Please let us know what you think of this handout.

Would you say this handout is hard to read? ☐ Yes ☐ No

easy to read? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Please circle the parts of the handout that were hard to understand.

Would you say this handout is interesting to read? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Why or why not?

Would you do anything differently after reading  
this handout? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what?

After reading this handout, do you have any  
questions about the subject? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what?

Is there anything you don't like about the drawings?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, what?

What changes would you make in this handout to make it better or easier to understand?

Please return your review of this handout to your nurse or doctor or send it to the address below.

The Emily Center  
Health Education Specialist  
Phoenix Children's Hospital  
1919 East Thomas Road  
Phoenix, AZ 85016-7710

602-933-1395

**Thank you for helping us!**