



## How to Help...Your Teen in the Hospital

Children between the ages of 12 and 18 years old are changing in many ways... physically, emotionally, and socially. Teens experience changes in their thought processes. They have a desire for increased separation from parents, increased independence in decision-making, and form an increased dependence on their peer groups. The emotional effects from all of these changes can create moodiness and other changes in behavior. These emotions can create an internal struggle, especially when coupled with chronic illness and/or hospitalization. Teens also begin to think abstractly. At this stage of development, they can recognize the future long-term consequences of their actions or of an illness. Changes in a teen's level of activity or appearance can be difficult because their personal identity is tied into what they "do" or how they "look" The way in which teens "look" to others or what they "do" as an activity can be important to their status at school or with their peer groups. These issues directly relate to feelings of self-esteem.

Here are some key concepts to support your adolescent during hospitalization.

- Provide age-appropriate and accurate information as they understand abstract ideas and are capable of logical thought.
- Provide opportunities for problem-solving by involving your teen in planning cares/treatments when possible.
- Encourage your teen to continue normal self-care routines.
- Provide opportunities for activity as well as time for quiet.
- Encourage maintaining connections with friends and school peers.
- Protect your teen's need for modesty and privacy.
- Support your teen's need to have family present during hospital experiences.
- Encourage your teen to discuss their concerns and questions with both you and their medical team.
- Encourage the expression of feelings and remind them that sometimes talking about feelings can help. Keeping feelings bottled up can create anger, withdrawal from socialization, or frustration.
- Clearly state your expectations of your teen's behavior to maintain limits that encourage mutual respect and boundaries.
- Always provide your teen with honest, truthful information as this will maintain trust.
- Remember teens are not adults and although they understand many large concepts, they may still need clarification.