Supporting a Preschool-Age Child in the Hospital

Play in the hospital makes it less stressful and more comfortable to be here. Play also helps children of all ages focus on activities, rather than their reason for being here. Focusing on the child's needs helps their learning and coping skills while in the hospital.

Some tips to keep in mind:

■ Let staff know about any special words your child uses for familiar objects or tasks.

■ Bring a few of your child’s favorite items from home.

■ Help your child to participate in play and activities, such as reading, coloring, and music.

■ Let them know when events will happen. Use familiar phrases like “before lunch” or “after bath.” A time like “two-thirty” does not mean much to a preschooler.

■ Offer age-appropriate choices to provide some control—for example, “Would you like to look at books, or color a picture?”

■ Provide boundaries and limits. This will help your child feel safe.

■ If you leave, let your child know beforehand, and say when you will be back.

■ When possible, let your child know about procedures ahead of time. This will give them time to prepare. Use simple language and words they can understand.

■ Remind your child that going to the hospital is not their fault.

For more information or to connect with a Child Life Specialist, please visit: http://ucdavis.health/childlife