

Supporting your child AFTER AN INJURY

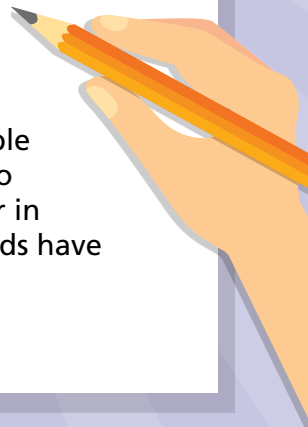


Experiencing an injury can be very distressing for children and their families. However, these feelings usually improve over time. As parents, the most important thing you can do is to learn what to look out for, support your child and ask for help if you need it.



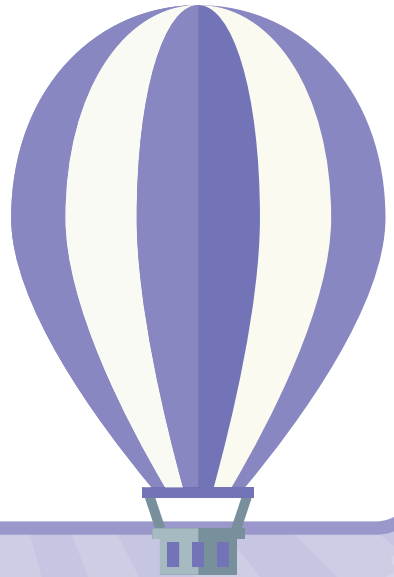
The following reactions in children are most common:

- Feeling sweaty, tense, sick, exhausted or bad-tempered.
- Distractible, have difficulties concentrating, angry and have a tendency to be overactive.
- Unsettled or disturbed sleep e.g. nightmares, night terrors.
- Bedwetting, changes in appetite and tearful.
- Children may feel guilty or believe the incident happened because they misbehaved.
- Seem younger than they did before the injury by, for example, demanding more attention, being clingy or frightened of being alone and seem reluctant to try new things.
- They may be upset by memories of the injury. Memories may be triggered by reminders of how or where the injury happened, such as sudden loud noises or smells. They may avoid reminders of the incident such as not wishing to get into a car, cross a road, ride a bike or play in a playground.
- Fear of people in uniform such as nurses, because they associate them with painful procedures.
- Children may be worried about not being able to do the same activities as before, returning to school, any changes in their physical abilities or in way they look, particularly if their faces or hands have been affected.



As parents, you may feel understandably over-protective towards your children for a while. You may also harbour feelings of guilt and experience intrusive memories or 'flashbacks' of the injury and treatment. It is very common to find it difficult to sleep and you may feel constantly on edge and irritable. You may also experience anger towards others who you feel were responsible for what happened and find it difficult to cope with any changes in your children's behaviour. All of these reactions, worries and feelings are normal and to be expected to occur for days and sometimes several weeks or even longer after a traumatic event.

It is important to remember that other family members may be affected, particularly if they witnessed the injury. Finally, brothers and sisters may feel jealous of the attention being given to the injured child so giving them extra time and attention is important.



There are several things you can do:

- In the first few days and weeks after the injury help your child to feel safe and provide physical reassurance and comfort.
- Observe your child's behaviour, listen carefully and allow him or her to talk about feelings and worries if he or she wants to.
- Instead of focusing on what has happened, try to concentrate on the present and on how to best support your child and other family members who may have been affected.
- Make sure you are looking after yourself; this will help you and your child.
- It is important to recognise that all of those who witnessed the incident may be in need of support.
- It is advisable to talk to visitors, particularly younger children, about what to expect before visiting the ward. Hospital environments can be quite daunting.
- Be aware that your child may feel guilty if he or she sees your distress.
- It is generally recommended that you answer any questions your child has about the injury in an age-appropriate way. He or she may prefer to draw pictures, use puppets or listen to stories, all of which may help him or her to make sense of what has happened. This also helps to prevent your child making up his or her own version of events.

- Children tend to ask questions when they are ready for answers. Try not to talk about what has happened more than is asked for by your child. Avoid any 'forced' conversations with him or her.
- When you are ready, begin to parent your child as you did before the incident by gradually returning to normal routine everyday things as much as possible. This will help to build up confidence and a feeling a safety.
- Spend time with family and friends. This type of support is known to help children and adults cope with unpleasant experiences.
- Be aware that the other children in the family may need help and more reassurance than usual.
- Although it is understandable that your child will want to avoid things which are upsetting, this can make it harder to overcome fear and slows down progress. For this reason, try and encourage your child to gradually face the reminders of what has happened for increasing lengths of time. You should find that over time the fear decreases.
- Praise your child whenever he or she faces these fears and talk about the next steps or goals.
- Finally, make sure you seek out support for yourself from family and friends and ask for help if you need it. This will help you to support your child and other children in the family.

WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

Sometimes you may find that after several weeks, things are not improving and life does not seem to be returning to normal. If this is the case, please speak to your medical team in the hospital or your GP. If there is a psychologist in your medical team you may like to ask to be referred to this service. There is some useful information listed below about how to cope with anxiety.

What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety
(What-to-Do Guides for Kids) Paperback by Dawn Huebner

Trauma and Coping:

www.minded.org.uk/families/index.html#/id/56cc7831a55aa90a52727c3a

www.calm.com

www.mindfulnessforteens.com

www.mentalhealth.org.uk/podcasts-and-videos/podcasts-for-your-wellbeing



These toolkits have been written by NHS clinical psychologists and neuropsychologists working for University Hospitals Bristol. They have been co-designed with service users and healthcare staff. These toolkits are only intended to provide general advice and information. Please discuss your individual needs with your doctor or specialist nurse. If you would like more information on Psychology Services please go to **INSERT WEBSITE ADDRESS**.

We would like to thank patients and other healthcare staff for their contributions to this toolkit.

For access to other patient toolkits please go to the following address: **WEBSITE ADDRESS**

For this leaflet in large print, audio or PDF format, please email patientleaflets@uhbristol.nhs.uk

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