

Contact Details

Possible ways to help siblings:

- Brothers and sisters need to know that it is okay to feel angry. They need the opportunity to talk about difficult things and sharing worries with other people can make it easier.
- They may need reassurance that they can't catch the illness and it is unlikely that they become ill too. Listen to them if they say they feel unwell.
- Try to maintain a normal level of discipline with all children in the family, to reassure everyone that family life is as normal as possible. If the child who is unwell is being treated differently, try to explain why this is to brothers and sisters.
- Speak to friends and school to let them know what is happening at home so they can provide appropriate support.
- How children cope with illness in the family may change as they get older which means the support they need may also change.

Clinical psychologists can meet with you to discuss any difficulties and other ways that may help you and your family to cope at this time. We can not unfortunately see siblings directly but can give information about other agencies or staff that may be able to help. For further information, please contact:

Department of Clinical Psychology
2nd Floor (above A & E)
Royal Hospital for Sick Children

Telephone: 0141 201 0644

or

Action for Sick Children Scotland

Telephone: 0131 553 6553

Website: www.ascscotland.org.uk

E-mail: enquiries@ascscotland.org.uk



Based on material written by Katherine Ballard in association with UKCCSG Sibling Project Group.

Issued: 2011 Review Date: 2014



Helping Brothers & Sisters Cope When a Child is Unwell



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This publication is also available in large print. Other formats and languages can be supplied on request. Please contact us.

Each brother and sister reacts differently when their sibling becomes chronically or acutely unwell. They naturally have concerns about the changes they see in their sibling who is unwell and in family life at this time.

This leaflet describes some of the difficulties that brothers and sisters can experience, and possible ways to cope with these difficulties. It is hard to give extra support to other children when you are tired and worried about the child who is unwell. However, giving siblings your time and support can help them understand and cope with what is happening.



When a child/young person is unwell, some **common difficulties for siblings include:**

- Fears about what might happen to their sibling.
- Feeling jealous of the child who is unwell if they are getting more attention and treats.
- Feeling angry that their sibling is ill.
- Missing their parents.
- Difficult behaviour.
- Becoming withdrawn.
- Worries about their own health.
- Feeling guilty or that it is their fault.
- Problems concentrating on schoolwork.



Possible ways to help siblings:

- Spending time with brothers and sisters and making them feel that they are still special is important.
 - Take time to explain to siblings what is happening to the child who is unwell.
 - Try to reassure them and discuss any questions or fears. If you are unsure of the answers to some questions it is best to be honest about this.
 - Children are often reassured by visiting their brother or sister. Their fears about what is happening to them can be more frightening than what is really happening.
 - Encourage visitors to bring something small for brothers and sisters too if they are bringing a gift for the child who is unwell.
 - They may need to be told that nothing that they or anyone else did caused their sibling to be unwell.
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