



Managing Upset

A Guide for Parents, Guardians, and Caretakers*

*NOTE: The word "Parent" will be used throughout this module, but includes all of the above



Children and Stress

- Many children survive traumatic events without permanent emotional or psychological damage
- A child's ability to handle stress is greatly affected by their personality and family support
- Changes in behavior or attitude are a sign of stress overload in children
- If behaviors occur often or over a long time period, it can be a sign the child is overwhelmed and needs more help



What You Can Do

1. Recognize signs of stress and upset
2. Provide support
3. Learn and use strategies to reduce upset
4. Teach your child coping skills



#1 Recognize Signs of Stress and Upset

- Children show stress in different ways, including:
 - Irritability, temper tantrums, or crying
 - Return to younger behaviors: bedwetting, thumb sucking, clinging to a blanket or stuffed animal, changes in speech
 - Withdrawal/Isolation: refusing visitors, not talking or interacting with people, hiding under covers, etc.
 - Changes in sleep: nightmares, trouble sleeping, sleeping a lot, etc.
 - Clinging, demanding attention, or making unreasonable requests



#1 Recognize Signs of Stress and Upset

- Older children may show stress by:
 - Prolonged irritability or negative mood
 - Changes in school performance
 - Frequent outbursts of anger
 - Inability to cope with problems and daily activities
 - Changes in sleeping or eating habits
 - Social withdrawal from family, friends, or activities
 - Defiance of authority, truancy, theft, or vandalism
 - Smoking or substance abuse



#2 Provide Support

- Express confidence in your child's ability to deal with stress
- Remind your child they are not alone and that family and friends are there to help
- Encourage your child to get support from friends



#2 Provide Support

- Provide physical contact (back rubs, holding, cuddling, hugs, and kisses) to comfort and ease upset
- Maintain contact with people important to your child (grandparents, siblings, friends, etc.) through visits, telephone calls, or online communication
- Ask your child how you can help them



#3 Strategies to Reduce Upset

- Identify and use what has previously helped in the past to soothe and reassure your child
- Encourage your child to use words to describe what they are thinking and feeling by asking simple questions:
 - Are you mad?
 - Did that hurt a lot or a little bit?
 - Are you scared?
 - Did that surprise you?



#3 Strategies to Reduce Upset

- Remind your child how they successfully handled stressful events in the past
- Provide structure through routine: meal times, nap time, bedtime, school work, play time, bathing, etc.
- Maintain important rituals such as: bedtime story, going to sleep with music, tucking in for the night, etc.



#3 Strategies to Reduce Upset

- Talk about positive past events and engage your child in planning future events
- Ask hospital staff for suggestions on how to help your child deal with upset
- Get professional help for yourself or your child when problems seem beyond your skills or comfort level



#4 Teach Your Child Coping Skills

- Teach your child simple coping strategies: calming self-talk, deep breaths, distraction, counting to 10
- Talk about what is happening; have your child explain what it means to them
- Demonstrate and reinforce how to express thoughts and feelings in a constructive way
- Encourage problem solving
- Remind and encourage your child to laugh



Age Considerations: Children 2-6 Years Old

- Provide favorite toys, blanket, or stuffed animals
- Bring familiar items to the hospital
- Utilize diversions such as music, cartoons, stories, pets, games and toys
- Remember that holding and cuddling is especially important in young children

Age Considerations: Children 7-11 Years Old



- Utilize diversions such as videos, music, stories, computer games, hobbies, etc.
- Encourage and assist them keeping in contact with friends
- Consider discussing upset with their educators or school counselor



Returning to Education and Continued Healing

Age Considerations: Children 12-17 Years Old



- Utilize diversions such as videos, music, books, computer games, cell phone, social networking websites, hobbies, etc.
- Assist them to keep in contact with friends
- Connect them with burn survivor support groups so they can ask others how they have dealt with feelings of upset
- Consider professional counseling



Returning to Education and Continued Healing

Age Considerations: Young Adults 18+

- Have your young adult identify activities and interests they enjoy. Help them participate in these.
- Encourage your young adult to contact burn survivor support groups so they can ask others how they have dealt with feelings of upset
- Consider professional counseling



Returning to Education and Continued Healing