

Developmental Reactions to Hospitalization

	Major Fears	Reactions	Ways to help
Infants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caregiver separation • Strangers • Over stimulation or under stimulation • Unmet needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Distrust • Regression of milestones • Crying/Fussiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent involvement in care • Allow comfort items to be present with pt • Swaddling or comfort positioning • Sensory support
Toddlers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation • Unfamiliar people and surroundings • Pain and bodily injury • Disruption of normal routine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncooperativeness • Resistance • Screaming/Tantrums • Regression of milestones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassure that pt will not be abandoned • Keep familiar items with pt for security (blanket, stuffed animal, etc.) • Use short, simple explanations • Encourage play with medical equipment • Provide child with choices
Preschoolers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of Control • Unfamiliar people and surroundings • Pain and bodily injury • Inability to distinguish between fantasy and reality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger or aggression • Withdrawal • Regression of milestones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare child in advance for medical experiences (if possible) • Use pictures, medical equipment, and hospital related plat to reinforce explanations • Explain sensations (sight, sound, touch, smell, taste) • Provide appropriate choices • Reassure pt that hospital is not punishment
School-Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of failure or lack of bravery • Loss of control and decision making • Death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal • Frustration • Sleep disturbances • Modesty • Pain • Interruption of daily routines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for hospital/medical experiences • Encourage medical equipment manipulation when appropriate • Normalization • Provide choices

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain that hospitals are not punishments and explain “why” things need to occur
Adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Altered body image • Loss of self-control • Separation from peers • Lack of privacy • Falling behind in school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety/Depression • Withdrawal • Frustration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include pt in decision-making • Discuss potential changes in body image (incision-size, bruising, etc.) • Encourage contact with peers • Prepare pt for any medical occurrences

Possible Behavioral Reactions Following Hospitalization

- Stranger and separation anxiety
- Tempter Tantrums when a parent leaves
- Changes in eating or sleeping routines
- May demand more attention that prior to hospitalization
- Mood changes
- Regression of milestones or behavior (acting younger than age)
- Withdrawal from friend or peer groups
- Anxiety about future doctor appointments or hospitalizations
- Adjustment returning to school

How to Help

- Encourage normal routines.
- Encourage pt to talk about hospitalization and to express concerns, feelings, and fears related to experiences.