

What should you expect?

Visits to the Emergency Department (ED) can feel stressful for children and families. Your child may feel nervous or upset after going to the ED. These feelings are normal. You and your family can help your child cope with their emotions.

After an ED visit, your child may feel:

- Scared,
- Worried,
- Angry, or
- Stressed.

Your child may:

- Act quiet (withdrawn);
- Cling to their parents or caregivers;
- Change their sleep or toileting schedule;
- Refuse certain foods ('picky' eating);
- Share worries about future medical visits; or
- Have more outbursts or tantrums.

How can you help?

- **Return to your family's routines.** Routine and structure help children feel safe.
- **Be patient and offer support.** It may take days or weeks for your child to feel in control of their emotions again. During this time, give extra comfort. Hugs or reassuring words can help your child to feel better.
- **Talk about feelings.** You and your child may have many feelings after an ED visit. There is no wrong way to feel. Ask your child what they are thinking or feeling. Reassure your child that their feelings are okay. Tell your child how you feel, too.
- **Read books about going to the hospital.** Reading is a great way to connect with your child, learn, and help your child understand what happened. Some books that might help are:
 - *Franklin goes to the hospital*, by Paulette Bourgeois
 - *It's time for your checkup*, by Shani Thornton,
 - *Going to the hospital*, by Anne Civardi
- **Use therapeutic play.** Children process new experiences through play. You can use play to help your child feel better about their ED visit.

Support your child through play

Children process their experiences through play. If your child is trying to understand their ED visit, you may want to try **therapeutic play** with your child. The goal of therapeutic play is to help children feel more in control of their experiences. It can also help children cope with emotions. When you do therapeutic play with your child, you can learn about their worries and feelings.

Ideas for therapeutic play after an ED visit:

- **Play ‘doctor’:** Your child can help stuffed animals or toys using a toy doctor’s kit.
- **Use real medical supplies:** Play with band-aids, oral syringes, masks, gauze, gloves, and other supplies. Make sure the supplies are safe for play. You can:
 - Put medical supplies in a bin with toys, rice, or water, or
 - Make crafts, like glove balloons, or Band-Aid butterflies on paper.
- **Make expressive art:**
 - Fill an oral syringe with paint and squirt it onto a canvas, or
 - Draw how you or your child is feeling.

How to support your child during therapeutic play:

- **Observe your child.**
 - Watch how your child plays. Listen to what your child says. This can help you to understand how your child feels about the ED visit.
- **Invite your child to share what they think and feel.**
 - Ask your child how they feel. Let your child know their feelings are okay. Say things like, *“You’re right, that sounds scary,”* or *“Can you tell me more about that?”*. Avoid language like *“That didn’t really hurt,”* or *“It wasn’t scary”*.
 - Children may prefer to talk through their toys. You can ask your child, *“Is your doll nervous about going to the hospital?”* or *“What do you think will help your doll?”*. Your child’s answers can help you know how they feel, or what might help.
- **Let your child choose how to play.**
 - It does not matter if your child uses supplies correctly.
- **If your child says something untrue, redirect them.**
 - If a child does not understand something, they may try to fill in the gaps. Many children may choose explanations that are not true. It is important to address this. So, if your child says, *“My doll needs a needle poke because they were bad,”* you could say, *“I know getting a poke can hurt. Nurses give needle pokes to help us feel better and stay safe. Does your doll need medicine to help their body feel better?”*

Where can you get extra support?

After an ED visit, most children and families feel better within a few days or weeks. If you notice lasting changes in your child, or if you are worried, please contact your primary care provider or school counselor.

You may also want to contact:



Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre at BC Children's Hospital

- Mental health information for parents and caregivers in BC
- Website includes online resources about mental health conditions, supports, and treatment options
- Parents and caregivers can also speak with Parent Peer Support Workers with living experience of mental health care journeys



Early Childhood Mental Health Services at Vancouver Coastal Health

- Treatment and supports for children ages 0-5 years in Vancouver and Richmond
- Address social, emotional, behavioural and parenting concerns
- Vancouver location accepts self-referral
- Richmond location requires referral from health-care provider



Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) Intake Clinics

- Drop-in access to community mental health supports and services for children and youth in BC
- At the Intake Clinic, a clinician learns about your child's needs and creates a service plan



Family Smart

- Supports for parents and caregivers of children with mental health concerns
- Parents and caregivers can also speak with Parent Peer Support Workers with living experience of mental health care journeys
- Website includes online resources, event listings, and training opportunities



Child Mind Institute guide

- Online guide for supporting your child after a traumatic event
- Guidance on effective ways to support your child at each developmental stage



Child Life Department at BC Children's Hospital

- Child Life Specialists support children's coping in the hospital through play, preparation, and therapeutic interventions
- Web page includes resources you can use to help your child cope during future hospital visits



Family Library at BC Children's Hospital

- Borrow books, ebooks, and games on health topics
- Includes material for children, youth, and parents or caregivers
- Receive and return items by mail, for free, anywhere in BC or the Yukon