

Support for **siblings**

Siblings of transplant patients can be especially vulnerable to the emotional stress of transplant. You have a lot to think about right now, but there are a few simple things you can do each day to help siblings. Doing small things each day can go a long way to preventing worry or resentment that they might feel.

“Is it my fault?” What if they are afraid?

- Make sure to say the words, “It is not your fault.” Explain that people can get sick for no reason.
- Let them know you are planning for their care, too. Explain as much as you know about how they will be taken care of while you are away.
- It’s OK to say, “This is new for me too,” and that your whole family will work together to keep figuring it out.

Routine—when nothing is routine

- Children find comfort in predictability. As much as you can, try to pick something that will be the same every day. It could be that meal time is always at 6:00 p.m., or that you will call at the same time every day.
- Make a family calendar so they know what’s coming next.
- Let them know if plans have changed.

Surprises are only fun at birthdays

The unknown is scary and children often fear the worst. Whenever you can, give them an update, using words that work for their age.

- Hospital rooms can be scary. Spend time describing what is in the hospital room and how it will help their sibling.
- Before the sibling visits, let them know what their brother or sister looks like, if their appearance has changed.

“But what about me? Do I matter?”

It’s normal for siblings to feel jealous or resentful of the attention their brother or sister is getting from you. They might not tell you, but they need you to let them know they matter. These ideas can help them:

- Spend time each day—even a little—to ask about their school day, activities and friends. If you aren’t able to talk with them in person, then ask by phone or online.
- Ask them a question and then listen to what they say.
- Get excited for little or big accomplishments.

- Ask a family member or friend to spend quality time with your child when you can’t.
- If they are having a bad day, sympathize with their difficulties and offer your support.

It’s all going fine— isn’t it?

Many children won’t let you know how they are feeling. If you ask, “How are you doing?” they might say, “fine,” but try these tips to see if there might be more:

- Have them draw a picture of how they feel today. Ask them to describe what they drew.
- Ask them if they felt happy or afraid today.
- Listen and don’t try to minimize what they feel.
- Use the *Share your feelings* and *A note from me* activity sheets to help.

“Parents can help children staying at home feel important, too—by talking to them daily, asking about their day, what’s going on in their life, how can Mom or Dad help.”

—Jaime, child life specialist

Sharing the love—a little bit each day

- Siblings can lose sight of how much they are loved. A little love just for them, each day, reminds them.
- Tell each child the special things you love about them.
- Thank your children for their specific contributions.
- Point out the special relationship they have with their brother or sister—how they can offer support that no one else can.
- Encourage friends and family to include all of your children in their visits and well-wishes for the family.