

Everyone reacts differently when their child becomes chronically or acutely unwell. This can depend on your individual personality, the support available and the severity and type of health problems that your child has. However, it is usual for most parents to experience some stress at this time.

This leaflet describes some of the pressures on parents and families when a child is unwell, and ways to cope with these difficulties. It also includes ways to help you relax.



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

- Finding it hard to relax/ feeling tense
 - Finding it hard to be positive about the future
 - Problems in relationship with partner, such as arguments as a result of you both being tired and stressed.
 - Money worries/ time off work
 - Brothers / sisters displaying behaviour problems as parent busy coping with sick child
 - Worries about your child who is unwell
 - Distress from seeing your child unwell and undergoing medical treatment
 - Having to be the "strong" person, with little support for yourself
 - Uncertainty about medical terms and implications
 - Managing the physical aspects of caring for your child
- Possible strategies to help you cope:**
- Try and decide what is best for you in terms of the amount of information and support you want.
 - If you have any questions, please ask staff. There is no such thing as a silly question. Write questions down if it helps.
 - Try and prioritise, so those tasks that are not urgent can be left. If possible, arrange practical support so that friends and family help out.
 - Find someone that you feel you can talk to, or express how you are feeling.
 - Ask medical staff about support groups for parents or charitable organisations. There are services in the hospital such as the Family Support Service or the chaplaincy that can also help.
 - Try and maintain a normal routine as much as possible
 - Sometimes it is best to live one day at a time. Set small goals that can be easily met.

Ways that can help you to relax:

- If your child is in hospital, try and have short breaks from the ward. Perhaps friends or family can keep your child company
- If possible, try and have a little time for yourself, even just to watch TV.
- Light physical exercise, like going for a short walk, can help people to relax. Music that you enjoy or find soothing can also be relaxing
- Relaxation exercises can teach you to relax the muscles in your body.
- If you are feeling particularly stressed, try taking slow, deep breaths for a few minutes to help you feel calmer.



Department of Clinical Psychology

Clinical Psychologists work with children, young people and families in the hospital to help with a range of emotional and behaviour difficulties that are associated with illness and treatment.

A referral to see a Clinical Psychologist can be made by the Consultant in charge of your child's care. Please discuss with your Consultant in the first instance if you would like to be seen by one of our team.



Yorkhill Division

Managing Stress for Parents of Children with Chronic/ Acute Illness



**Department of Clinical
Psychology**