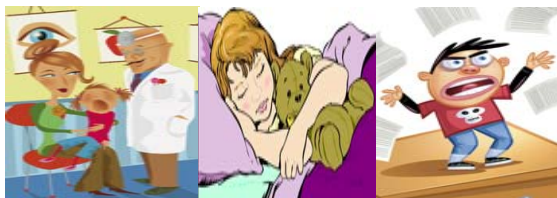


When a child/young person is unwell, some common behavioural and emotional difficulties include:

- Acting younger than their age (e.g. crying more, wetting, more clingy).
- Feeling anxious or panicky.
- Feeling irritable or frustrated.
- Feeling sad.
- Sudden changes in mood.
- Anger or aggression.
- Withdrawal from activities.
- Refusal to go to school.
- Sleep problems.
- Tiredness.
- Over-activity and finding it hard to relax.



There is no single reason for these changes in behaviour, but common reasons include:

- Behaviour is a child's way of expressing feelings, especially if they cannot understand or describe what they are experiencing.
- Need for more comfort when ill.
- Changes in routine due to their illness.
- Being separated from family and friends.
- Boredom and frustration from restricted activity.
- Anxiety or low mood about hospital and treatment.
- Tiredness from treatment.
- Side effects of medications.



Coping strategies and ways to manage behaviour:

- Talk to your child about the difficulties and help them feel understood and listened to. Use games, toys or drawing to help them talk about what is happening to them.
- Try and have games, toys and activities to do to keep busy. Play specialists and youth workers can help provide activity for you.
- Try to plan ahead and think of solutions together, and try to avoid triggers that you know upset your child, (e.g. if too much noise upsets them plan to go somewhere quieter).
- Try and maintain normal limits and normal activities where possible.
- Speak to family, friends and school to let them know that your child is not feeling like themselves and to be aware of this.

Coping strategies and ways to manage behaviour:

- Do not excuse behaviour that you would have previously not allowed. Even sick children still need to know what is not acceptable.
- Do not have too many things all going on at once or too many visitors at one time as it may be too overwhelming and tiring.
- Help your child to learn ways to cope with the difficulties, such as relaxation or space to rant and rave in a “kid proof” area.
- Answer questions that your child may ask about illness or the future honestly. Use language that they will understand.
- Try to use extra support for yourself and if possible give yourself some space if you're feeling stressed. There are many supports available in the hospital such as the [Family Support Service](#), [chaplancy](#) and [crèche](#).

Department of Clinical Psychology

Clinical Psychologists help with a range of emotional and behavioural difficulties that children, young people and their families coming to hospital and living with illness may experience.

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 or Nurse Specialist in the first instance if you would like to be seen by one of our team.

Useful website for reference:

<http://www.handsonscotland.co.uk>



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Changes in Behaviour

When your Child is Unwell



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This publication is also available in large print. Other formats and languages can be supplied on request. Please contact us.