

# Supporting children after a family member's stroke

## What you need to know

- › Like adults, each child will cope differently after a family member's stroke.
- › Talk to your children about what's happening and be guided by their wishes about visiting the hospital.
- › Ask family and friends to help support your children, and try and maintain family routines.

## How children cope

When a family member has a stroke everything changes suddenly. Like adults, each child will cope differently.

Children may not be able to express their feelings in words. Instead, they express their feelings through behaviour or play. Older children may choose not to discuss how they are feeling with you but may make their feelings known in other ways. Children may start to act younger or look for more attention.

## Things that can help

As always, your children will need your support and guidance. The parenting skills you already have will help, but there are particular strategies that can assist.

### Talk to your children about what is happening

It is natural to want to protect children from bad news and talking to children about painful things can be very hard to do.

However, without information and explanations, children see and overhear things and then try to fill in the blanks themselves. This can result in confusion, loneliness and worry. Children may be worried that the person will die, or that they themselves or other family members may have a stroke.

Sit down regularly and explain what is happening in the way you feel is most appropriate for your child. Using children's picture books or comics about stroke can help.

Answer your children's questions as best you can. As things change and time goes by, keep asking if they have any questions. Your children may find unexpected times to bring up how they are feeling. If you can, stop what you are doing and talk things through. You don't have to have all the answers or know the right thing to say, just make sure they know it's okay to talk about it.

The most important thing you can do is to listen and reassure your child. If you find it hard to talk about what is happening, ask a family member or friend to talk with your children. You can also ask a social worker for advice and support about how to talk to your children about what has happened.

### Be guided by your children's wishes about visiting the hospital

Many children find visiting hospitals comforting and feel it is important to be with the family member who has had the stroke.

Your treating team can advise you on preparing your children for the visit and can help explain the details of the treatment, care and equipment.

If something frightening happens during the visit make sure you explain it and give your children a chance to ask questions and talk about how they feel. You may like to ask for the help of a family member or friend to provide support during a hospital visit.

Children may not want to visit and that's okay too. You can suggest they make cards, take photos or record a message instead.

### Ask others to help support your children

You will be busy and will have your own feelings to cope with. If friends and family offer to help, ask them to spend time with your children. While older kids may be able to step up and help with household tasks, finding other adults to help will ensure your child doesn't feel overwhelmed.

School events, sports and hobbies will continue to matter to children, and can be a great source of support for them. Older children often receive a lot of support from friends, so it is important they stay connected with them.

Make sure childcare services and schools know about what has happened and are kept up to date. This will help them to support your child and answer any questions that come up.

### Try and maintain family routines and rules

Maintaining family routines can be difficult, but routines such as bedtimes and mealtimes are important to children and can be comforting for them.

### Additional help for children

It can be difficult to know if your child needs additional help. You know your child best, so if you are worried about them, it might be time to seek advice. Ask your general practitioner for a referral to a child or family service.

## More help

### StrokeLine

StrokeLine's nursing and allied health professionals can give you information, advice and support.

StrokeLine is a free, confidential and practical service.

Open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm Australian Eastern Time. StrokeLine is closed on National and Victorian public holidays.

Call **1800 787 653**

Email [strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au](mailto:strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au)

### EnableMe

EnableMe can help with your stroke recovery. Get the information you need. Connect with other survivors, families and carers.

Visit [enableme.org.au](http://enableme.org.au)

### Kids Helpline

Telephone and online counselling service for kids.

Call **1800 55 1800**

Visit [kidshelp.com.au](http://kidshelp.com.au)

### Young Carers

Call **1800 242 636**

Visit [youngcarers.net.au](http://youngcarers.net.au)

## About us

Stroke Foundation partners with the community to prevent, treat and beat stroke. We do this through raising awareness, facilitating research and supporting survivors of stroke.

## Contact us

 **StrokeLine 1800 STROKE (1800 787 653)**

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