

# COPING AFTER CHILD INJURY

*A guide for helping young children and their parents*

**CARE**  
COPING WITH ACCIDENT REACTIONS

## Sleep Problems

It is very common and normal for sleep problems to develop or increase after a child has had an accident or spent time in hospital. Children may be scared to stay alone in their bed, they may have nightmares or wake up more during the night. Sometimes children have returning memories of the accident or medical procedures when trying to fall asleep. It is important that you don't worry too much but try to support your child as best as possible. This tip sheet gives you some suggestions on what you can do to help your child overcome his or her sleep problems.

### *Things that you can do to help:*

#### **Keep or establish routines and rituals**

- ✦ Try to re-establish previous routines when putting your child to bed (e.g., read favourite story, cuddle in bed, sing a lullaby, etc.).
- ✦ Aim to have your child in bed the same time each night.
- ✦ Burning off energy before bedtime may help children get to sleep, but too much excitement 1 hour before bedtime may not help for some children (no TV, no running around, etc.).

#### **Help your child to feel secure in their bed and room**

- ✦ Encourage your child to think about something nice before going to sleep.
- ✦ Let your child listen to their favourite music.
- ✦ Use toys or another favourite comforter.
- ✦ Give your child something belonging to you (e.g., scarf, parent's pillow, etc.).
- ✦ Hang up a dream catcher in your child's room.
- ✦ Leave the child's bedroom door open a bit, use a nightlight in the child's room.
- ✦ For a short time, it may be helpful if your child sleeps in the same room with a sibling.
- ✦ For a short time, it may be helpful if your child sleeps in your room or come to your room if awake at night (only if the child asks to).



#### **Calm your child if they wake up because of nightmares**

- ✦ Go to your child's bed and give them a cuddle and kiss and tell him that the bad dreams will go away eventually.
- ✦ Use toys or some other favourite thing to calm your child.
- ✦ For a limited time, stay with your child until they fall asleep again.
- ✦ Ask your child to talk to you about what their nightmare was about in the morning.

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## *Signs that sleep difficulties are becoming a problem:*

- \* Sleep problems are continuing or getting worse over weeks.
- \* The sleep problems are affecting the child's or the family's functioning.

Sometimes no matter how supportive and understanding parents are, children may need professional help to overcome sleep problems. If you are concerned, contact the hospital, your pediatrician, or GP.

## *Personal coping Plan*

### *What I can do:*

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