



CARING FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE SICK

THE IDEA

When some young children are ill, they need someone with them most of the time, to comfort them, to care for them, to wash them, to give them food and drinks, and, as they get better, to play with them and to keep them occupied and happy. Although mother does all this best, older children can also help. They can also do some of the household work to give their mother more time to be with the sick child.

There are a number of ways an older child can help a younger brother or sister who is ill:

- by sitting with the sick child and keeping them company.
- by comforting and caring for them.
- by keeping the sick child clean.
- by playing with them.
- by giving them drinks.
- by knowing what to do for particular symptoms, such as fever, difficult breathing, vomiting and diarrhoea.



Companionship

Young children who are sick need someone with them, if possible, all the time, to provide reassurance and to help every time they need anything.

Comfort

A sick child is unhappy, sometimes because he or she is in pain, or because they are frightened, often without really knowing why. A caring brother or sister will be able to find out what the sick child needs and comfort them by touch and word. You can do things

for them which they may not be able to do for themselves, to help them through their illness – make them comfortable in bed, keep them warm, or cool, protect them from bright light, keep off flies, or just keep quiet so they can sleep.

Drinks

A sick child needs to drink a lot, about two pints of liquid a day. This can be cold water, milk, weak tea, fruit juice or soup. If there is diarrhoea, the oral rehydration drink is best

Where and how these activities have been used

This activity is particularly concerned with older children helping younger ones – and all older children have a right and duty to know the main contents of this sheet. But it is also important to know how sick children are looked after in the community. In some communities, adults may have ideas about treating sick children which are quite different from those in this sheet.

Ask the following questions (the answers are in the sheet):

- If a child has a high fever, do you (i) cover them up with blankets, or (ii) try to keep them cool?
- If a sick child wants to eat, do you (i) keep them drinking liquids only until the fever has passed, or (ii) encourage them to eat soft foods?

(see Activity Sheet 6.1, **Caring for Children with Diarrhoea**). Small drinks offered often may be the best way to persuade a child to drink the amount they need. Give a little at a time in sips from a cup or glass, or from a spoon.



Food

Although sick children usually do not want to eat, they need food just as much as when they are well. Encourage them to eat by offering them things they like, and can easily swallow. It will be easier if you give them small amounts more often, e.g. every two to three hours. Soft foods like mashed bananas, rice or porridge, which do not need to be chewed, are best. Patient, regular spoon-feeding will give the sick child strength through the illness.

During an illness, children need to continue to eat regularly. After an illness children need at least one extra meal every day for a week.



Cleanliness

Sick children are more comfortable if you wash them regularly with soap and water, or just wipe them with a damp cloth, and put clean clothes on. Every time they vomit or have diarrhoea, they need to be thoroughly cleaned and comforted.

Sleep

Sick children need more sleep and rest to help them recover. Find them a quiet, comfortable place to sleep.

Play

As sick children begin to recover, they need to be kept interested and happy. An older brother or sister can read or tell stories, sing songs and play games with them.

Particular symptoms

Fever

A child with fever needs to be in the shade and be kept cool by being uncovered, fanned and wiped with a damp cloth. As they cool down, they need to be lightly covered again.

Difficult breathing

Young children often get ill with colds and coughs which get better after a few days. If the breathing becomes difficult, noisy or quick, this is a sign of a more serious illness, and you must get help without delay from a doctor or health worker.

Vomiting

Children often vomit when they are ill. Sometimes coughing makes them vomit. When they vomit, clean them, and change their clothes if necessary. Then give a small drink. If a child goes on vomiting, put them to lie on their side to reduce the risk of their choking on the vomit. If you cannot get the child to drink or they vomit every time, get help. A child who vomits again and again should be taken to a health worker.

Diarrhoea

Any child who is ill may have some diarrhoea with loose faeces. You must wash your hands carefully after cleaning a child.

Diarrhoea needs no special diet, only the regular food and drinks already described. More serious diarrhoea with frequent watery faeces must have immediate treatment with the oral rehydration drink of sugar and salt in water (see Activity Sheet 6.1 **Caring for Children with Diarrhoea**), and the child should be taken to a doctor or health worker. Give the drink a little at a time, and make sure that the sick child drinks one glass of oral rehydration drink for every faeces they pass. Keep on giving the oral rehydration drink until the faeces are normal. This may take more than one day.

Asking for help

Sick children usually get well quite quickly, but they can also get worse very quickly. You must always get help from a health worker or doctor if:

- the fever is very high.
- the sick child continues to vomit.
- the sick child won't drink.
- they have very watery faeces.
- they have noisy, difficult breathing.
- they complain of a lot of pain in their head or tummy.
- they cannot be woken up easily.
- they have a fit.
- the illness seems to get worse.
- they are still sick after two to three days.

Make sure you know where you can find help.

Activities

Children can discuss

Ask children how it feels to be sick: When were you ill? How did you feel? What did others do for you? What did you want most of all when you were sick? What made you feel good when you were sick?

Children can experiment and observe

One of the children can run around until they are hot. Then they can be wrapped up tightly in a cloth or blanket for some time, including the back of their head. Ask the child how they feel now. Then uncover them so that the body heat can escape.



It is not good for a child with a fever to be wrapped up tightly in too many blankets or clothes.

Food can be mashed and passed down a tube of bamboo or through a narrow-necked bottle. Let the children see how soft food goes down easily, whereas hard and lumpy food sticks.

A child who is sick can swallow soft food without working hard to chew it, and the soft food goes down more readily.

Let them discuss the illnesses of younger brothers and sisters. Who looked after the sick child? Were the older children able to help in any way? What do you think they could have done to care for the younger child? Is the mother happy to have help from the older children?

If the children have already discussed the signs or symptoms of illness (see Activity Sheets 3.2 **Looking After Our Eyes**, 6.1 **Caring for Children with Diarrhoea**, 6.5 **Polio**, 6.7 **Coughs, Colds, Pneumonia (A.R.I.)**), they can ask each other questions to see how much they remember. They can discuss the various symptoms, and tell how they can help a young child who has those symptoms to feel more comfortable.

Children can practise

A child who is hot from running can be wiped with a damp cloth, to show how it cools the hot body. Children can be shown the correct way to wash a sick child, perhaps by the health worker. They can be encouraged to practise on a doll, or even on each other.



Children can show how they would prepare food for a child who is ill, and how they would give it to the child. Would they just leave it beside the child in a bowl? How often would they offer food to a sick child? Let one child play the part of the sick child, and be given drinks and soft food on a spoon.

If the children have already learned how to make the special drink which must be given to children with diarrhoea (Activity Sheet 6.1 **Caring for Children with Diarrhoea**), they can talk about how to do it, and make some in class.

Children can find out

Find out who takes care of sick people in the community, and find out how they do it. What are the most important things they do for the sick person?

Children can make a play or tell a story

A group of children can make up a play to show how to care for a child who is ill. One child can pretend to be sick. Other children can act and mime how they can care for the child and comfort them: wash their clothes;

help them eat; give them many drinks; bathe their head and hands and mouth and so on. They can play the part of all the different people in the family, and show what they do when a little child is ill.

Or children can tell a story to show the others what they did when one of the younger children was ill at home.

Children can make cartoons

Children can make strip cartoons, or posters, or cards to show the different stages of an illness and the care that must be given at each stage.

Follow-up

Find out how many of the children have cared for a sick child at home. What did they do? What could they have done better?

Perhaps they could keep diaries or medical cards to record how they helped. Did any of them stay up in the night to help mother give liquids to a child with diarrhoea or vomiting, or high fever?

Ask the children questions to see how much they remember about the importance of:

- proper food and drink.
- comfort and care.
- cleanliness.

USING THIS SHEET

There are many ways in which **older children** can help and comfort younger ones who are ill. This will help the sick child to get better more quickly. It will also help the mother, who will have many extra jobs to do when a child is sick.

Teachers in school can teach older children the ways they can help by using these ideas in health lessons, perhaps using short plays or mime, or telling stories.

Health workers can use these ideas with groups of children in the community, in a queue at the health clinic, in youth groups, or in schools.

Youth leaders, and **Guide and Scout leaders**, can adapt these activities, and perhaps award a badge or certificate for proficiency in child care.