How do I tell my children why their brother/sister is in the hospital?
It is important to be honest! There is no ‘perfect’ way to tell your children but you should tell them as soon as you can so they do not find out from someone else. You can tell them that the hospital is a place where doctors and nurses can take care of their brother or sister while he/she is not feeling well or to fix something that is not working the way it should. Use simple words that are not scary and that your children know. It is ok to ask for help if you do not know how to answer your child’s questions about their brother or sister’s stay in the hospital. Child Life Specialists can help you answer your children’s questions. These specialists can help siblings learn about their brother or sister’s injury or illness and give them emotional support.

Can my children visit their brother/sister in the hospital?
We welcome siblings coming to visit. Before a sibling comes to the hospital, it is best to get them ready for the visit. Children should be told what they may see, hear and even smell when going in to a hospital room. If your child is in an ICU area (NICU, PICU, CVICU, or Burn), first ask your nurse if it is ok for a child to visit. For brothers or sisters in an ICU, a Child Life Specialist can help you get your children ready for this visit. It is also good to sit down with your children after the visit to their answer questions.

My children are not able to visit. Are there other ways to make them feel part of their brother or sister’s hospital stay?
Yes! Here are some ways to help siblings feel connected:
• Write letters, send drawings or pictures from home to put in their brother/sister’s room
• Brothers or sisters can make handprints with paints or markers to send home for siblings to see. You can hang these pictures on your refrigerator or in the sibling’s room.
• Allow siblings to make telephone calls or send text messages to their brother or sister while they are in the hospital just to catch up on what has been going on
• Give brothers and sisters in the hospital a ‘job’ to call in and check on their siblings at home. This will help them to feel important if they are checking to see if their siblings have done their homework, cleaned their rooms or have eaten dinner
• Have the sibling pick out their brother/sister’s favorite stuffed animal, blanket, CD, poster, etc. and have a parent bring it up to the hospital at the next visit

What types of things will my children deal with when a brother or sister is in the hospital?
• Make sure your children know that their brother/sister is not in the hospital because he or she was “bad”.
• Many children may be scared they will catch the same illness their brother/sister has or they may feel guilty their brother/sister is ill.
• Other siblings may feel jealous that their brother/sister is getting extra attention from you. Some “acting out” behavior is normal for children to do at home.
They may also be anxious, tearful, or show anger. These are all normal.

It is best if you sit down and talk with your child as soon as you see the behaviors. Be sure to tell them it is ok for them to feel the way they do, but this behavior is not ok. Set limits with your child as soon as this behavior happens and stick to those limits!

Helpful tips when your child has a brother or sister in the hospital
- Try to make time to spend with your children away from the hospital
- Always be honest with your children and listen to their questions
- Because there are a lot of changes going on, it is important for your children to keep their normal routines
- Keep your children’s teachers, friends and their parents up to date about the illness
- Let them help you and give them a role so they feel a part of what is happening.

Every child is different and deals with having a brother/sister in the hospital in their own way. If you have any questions, please call the Child Life and Education department at 501-364-1412.