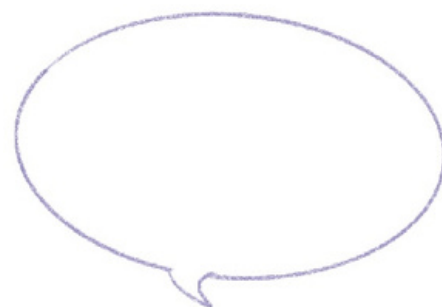


## Separation Anxiety

It is very common and normal for separation anxiety to develop or increase after a child has spent time in hospital. Children want and need to be close to their parents for comfort and reassurance to help them feel safe and secure. In the first few weeks after a PICU admission, separation anxiety and clinginess is nothing to worry about as this is your child's way of coping during a scary and overwhelming time. This is a sign of a good parent-child bond! However, over time it is important that children continue to explore their environment, spend time with other caregivers and friends, and continue their normal activities (e.g., going to day-care, playing with friends). This tip sheet gives you some suggestions on what you can do to help your child overcome separation anxiety.

### Minimise separations or keep separations short at first

- Try to stay close to your child if they are still very anxious in the first days after the PICU admission.
- Always tell your child when you are leaving, where you are going and when you will be back, even babies. Say goodbye briefly and don't drag it out. If possible, settle your child in to an enjoyable activity before you go.
- Tell your child what you will be doing when you see them next (e.g. we'll have pasta for dinner later/I'll give you a big cuddle/you can watch Bluey when I pick you up) - this gives your child something concrete to look forward to.
- Gently encourage your child to separate from you by giving them practice. It is important that they experience positive separations and reunions.
- During separations, let your child play with something that gives them comfort or reminds them of you (e.g., photo, cloth, something special in their pocket, draw a love heart on their hand).
- Leave your child with familiar people in familiar environments where possible.



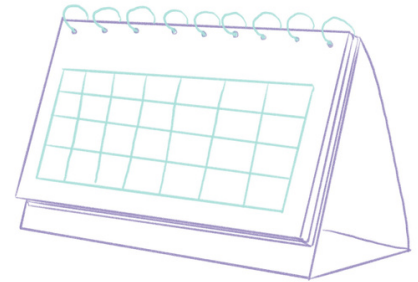
# COPING AFTER A PICU ADMISSION

*A guide for helping young children and their parents*

# PICU CARE

## Spend a lot of quality time with your child

- Have plenty of quality time together and give lots of positive attention, e.g., play with your child, read them a storybook, give lots of cuddles and kisses etc.
- If possible, have this time together as part of a regular routine, and/or plan special shared activities together, so that your child knows what to expect and has something to look forward to.



## Help your child to feel confident with other people

- If possible, parents should take turns in caring for their child.
- Organise friends and relatives to visit so your child gets used to other people again.
- Stay close to your child when new people are around. Show your child that new people are OK (e.g., nurses and doctors are there to help them get better).
- When you greet a stranger in a friendly way, with smiles and a positive tone of voice, children are less likely to feel afraid. If your child cries or looks afraid with a new person, it's OK to comfort them and try again later.



## Praise your child

- Praise your child when they have managed without you or interacted with other people.



## Stay calm when your child is upset

- Be calm, relaxed, and reassuring towards your child. If you seem worried or sad your child will notice and think that the situation is unsafe too.
- Avoid being critical or getting angry in front of your child.



