Staying Connected When Away from Home

Maybe you’ve had to stay inpatient after surgery for a few days – or, perhaps, you’ve had a bone marrow transplant that requires you to stay in isolation for months…

Any time away from people you loved and “normal” life is tough. There’s bound to be a lot of waiting (for test results, signs that things are “working,” etc.). You may experience interrupted sleep, or feelings of discomfort from being in an unfamiliar environment. There may also be physical illness – or fear that it’s coming, even if not felt yet. During these times, circular thoughts and intense, difficult feelings tend to run wild!

How do you stay calm during this time? How do you stay connected to the things you care about and that keep you feeling better?

We’ve spoken to some parents who have been away from home due to cancer treatment. Here’s what helped them:

1) Staying connected in the ways you can - Some parents used Facetime or Skype to chat with their families. Others encouraged visitors to stop by – even if they had to wear masks and gloves, these visitors helped our parents feel up-to-date and included on life outside the hospital.

2) Connecting with others – Everyone need to vent or be social! Hospital staff may become the people you talk to most for a time. Some of our parents said that a few of them even came to feel like friends or even a second family. Online support groups, on the other hand, can be places to vent to and get support and understanding from other people in similar situations.

3) Getting letters and news from home – Connection can also come in the form of letters from home. Being pen pals with your kids could give you both something to look forward to, and you can keep the letters as a memory of your exchanges.

4) Daily check-ins – Emotional needs change, so it’s important to check-in with your self regularly by asking “what do I need/ what would make me feel better now?” Some parents said to us that they wanted company on some days and wanted to me alone others. Difficult feelings can make you want to withdraw in ways that may or may not
be helpful to you ultimately. Ask your self if you need this time alone to process and heal – or if your time would be better spend doing something to distract/ energize/ shake up your current thoughts and feelings.

5) Get out of bed (if possible) – If you’ve been advised by someone on your medical team to get out of bed and walk around a bit, try to do that activity. Being active could lift your spirits!

6) Bringing things from home – Hospital rooms can feel alien and uncomfortable. Check with your medical team if you can bring things from home to make you feel more at ease.

7) Set goals – Recovery can feel painfully slow. Some parents set smaller goals so that they saw and appreciated signs of progress along the way.

8) Get a spokesperson – “How is she doing?” “When will he be back home?” Choose a person to relay this information so you don’t have to. It will free you up for focusing on your recovery and wellbeing.