

BANANAS HANDOUT

Why Playing Doctor Is Important For Children



Playing doctor, nurse, hospital, patient or just “plain sick” can be very important for your child. It’s play with a purpose. It can be very informative for the adult to stay close by and listen.

Through this kind of playing, children can gain a sense of mastery over situations beyond their control. A visit to the doctor, an illness, or a hospitalization are more understandable and tolerable for your child if you can help explain the unknown.

Before a visit to the doctor’s office or clinic, inform your child of exactly what will happen. Mention particulars like “you will probably have to sit still and wait for a while in the waiting room,” “you will probably have to take off your clothes,” “the nurse will want to put a thermometer in your mouth,” “people may be dressed in white coats.” Children need to know what to expect. If they are prepared, they will be able to transfer the trust they feel for you to those other adults who will be caring for them.

If there is a planned hospitalization, the medical staff will no doubt help you prepare your child. They may also suggest a visit to the hospital ward to see the machinery and meet the hospital staff. This would also be a good time for you to take a more active role in “playing doctor” at home. Initiate the play with dolls or puppets, perhaps make bandages for a special doll; use a bowl for a “bed potty,” serve the doll or the child dinner on a tray in bed.

Dolls really do make good patients. Although they can’t answer important questions such as “where does it hurt?” “what’s wrong?” “how are you feeling?” – they are especially cooperative in getting shots or in having bones splinted. Playing and talking this way can give a child the chance to care for and help others, to feel sympathetic toward other people’s pain, and to act out their fears, worries, and anger.

When children are playing doctor or hospital, suggest that they change roles often. If you are playing with your child, do the same. Then everyone has the opportunity to be both patient and doctor.

Remember that after hospitalizations and even after everyday illnesses (like the flu), children may regress and lose some of their recently acquired skills. For example, a child who had been toilet trained may begin bed wetting again. Talking about being sick (whether at home or in the hospital) will help children overcome those helpless feelings which come with physical weaknesses and restrictions.

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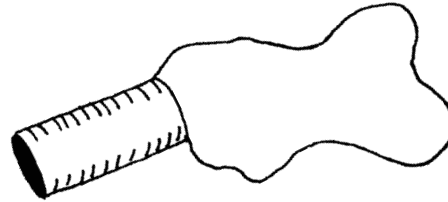
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Doctor's Kit

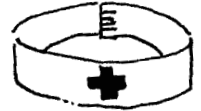
1. Stethoscope (& Otoscope)*

Materials Needed: toilet paper tube and string



2. Doctor's Hat

Materials Needed: Band of white paper stapled to fit head size – draw a Red Cross on front.



3. Bandages

Materials Needed: strips of masking tape or old sheets



4. Doctor's Outfit

Materials Needed: Old white shirt worn backwards with a Red Cross drawn on it.



5. How To Use A Stethoscope/Otoscope

Apply tube to chest near left nipple and listen for heart sounds (lub-dub-lub-dub). You may have a hard time hearing them but be patient and move the stethoscope around the chest until you do.



See what happens when the “patient” runs around or skips rope before you listen. Explain that the sounds you hear are the sounds of the heart as it pumps blood. The blood is pumped around your body inside tubes called blood vessels. Blood contains important things (nutrients and oxygen) to keep your body strong.

*You can also use the tube to look in ears, eyes, nose, mouth (just like the doctor or nurse do).

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