When children visit an Emergency Department, the overall experience can be overwhelming. Many times, children can have questions and misconceptions about the event. Emergency Department visits tend to be unexpected, so you may have to help your child (and siblings) understand what happened after the experience. If this is the case, keep in mind the following acronym, HONEST:

**H** - **HELP** children understand what happened and why (if you know), and what you’ll do to prevent the experience from happening again or an action plan if it does.

**O** - **OFFER** physical closeness and comfort to your child. Young children feel most secure when actually touching you and older children may be reassured by your presence.

**N** - **NEVER** blame. Sometimes kids make mistakes resulting in care from the Emergency Department. Having to go through the experience is a tough lesson learned. Save discipline and punishment for a less stressful time. Reassurance and unconditional support is what children need most in the moment.

**E** - **ENCOURAGE** conversation. Let your child(ren) know that it is okay to ask questions about what happened. Children may not want to talk right away, but if you let them know it’s okay to ask questions, you’re opening a door for conversation.

**S** - **SHARE** their feelings. When children tell you something seemed scary, acknowledge the fear and ask questions to learn more. Do not tell them that it wasn’t scary or that they shouldn’t have been afraid. This can make them less likely to share their feelings in the future.

**T** - **TELL** the truth. It is okay not to have all the answers. But letting your children know what you do know is important. Provide them small bits of information and watch how they react. When they ask questions it can mean they are ready for more information about the event.

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**PLAY IDEAS**

Reenacting an experience through play is a common way children deal with stressful events. Having the following toys available can be helpful:

- Toy medical kit
- Toy ambulance
- Dolls or plastic figures
- Paper and drawing/coloring items

**RESOURCES**

Websites can have lots of information if you feel your child needs further support: [https://www.starr.org/training/TLc/resources-for-parents](https://www.starr.org/training/TLc/resources-for-parents)

Books can help children identify with the characters and talk about their experience:

- “A Terrible Thing Happened” by M. Holmes
- “Alex and the Scary Things” by M. Moses

**CONVERSATION STARTERS**

- “How did you feel when the ambulance arrived?”
- “What did you think when you saw ______?”
- “How did it make you feel when ______ happened?”

If reading a book, ask your child if they identify with the characters:

- “Do you ever feel _____ like _____ does? (from the story)”