

# When Symptoms Worsen

## COVID-19 makes the lungs feel sick.

This can make a person cough, and have trouble breathing. Sometimes, bodies are strong enough to fight COVID-19 with the help of rest and medicine. Other times, bodies have a harder time fighting COVID-19 and need extra help.

## What can you do if a loved one is on a ventilator?

1. Maintain open, honest communication about the child's questions and concerns.
2. Explain to the child that their loved one is not able to talk on the phone because they are getting sedation (a medicine to help their body rest and sleep).
3. Validate that not talking to, or visiting, their loved one is hard; but explain social distancing, the medicine, and the ventilator are all in place to help their loved one get better.
4. Emphasize the hospital is the safest place their loved one could be right now.
5. Reassure that their loved one is not alone- nurses and doctors are checking on their loved one often and taking good care of them.
6. Encourage the child to write letters or cards to the hospitalized loved one.
7. Send videos and recordings for the hospital staff to play at bedside.

## If the loved one is improving and expected to come off the ventilator:

1. Acknowledge once the loved one feels better, the ventilator will go away and the loved one will be able to talk on the phone again.
2. Explain the loved one might still feel sleepy after coming off the ventilator and will still need a lot of rest. They might have to stay at the hospital for a little while longer until they feel well enough to return home.

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## If the loved one is not improving:

1. Let the child know the doctors are working very hard doing everything they can to help their loved one feel better, yet they are very, very sick. Children may need to hear this multiple times. This can allow the child to have some preparation for better understanding if the outcome is death.
2. Encourage the child to write down any questions or concerns. If you do not know the answer, reassure them that it was a good question and that you will ask the doctor during the next phone call.
3. Maintain open communication throughout the loved one's hospitalization. Even though we feel as if we are protecting children by not providing information to them, it sometimes can make things more confusing. By providing open and honest information about their loved one can help children cope and process the situation.

For more information or to reach a Child Life Specialist, please email [childlife@erlanger.org](mailto:childlife@erlanger.org) or call 423-778-5907.