

Parent *pages*



Resources for Christian Parents in the 21st Century

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When to Call it a Sick Day

It never fails, it always happens on the busiest day of the week, when everyone in the family is running behind and something big is happening at work. That's when one of the children is found with one hand on the tummy and the other on the forehead.

"Mommy, I feel sick."

The younger child has less ability to verbalize what is wrong and the older child is most likely to over-exaggerate symptoms. Even a child who has good language development and rarely "fakes" an illness is not the best judge of the wisdom of staying home or going to school. This falls on the shoulders of the parents. This fact does not make the right answer any easier to determine, however. Making this decision requires you to model three skills: discernment, compassion and consideration.

Discernment

Discernment is not a skill given automatically to parents. We learn discernment from God and through past experiences. This would be an excellent time to pray with your child to ask for God's help. When children are sick, they are fearful.

Young children, especially, fear that they will never get better. They will feel your love when you pray with them and will be

better able to trust you. With the feeling of trust replacing anxiety, your child will better be able to answer your questions.

Discernment comes from past experiences, so think about the last few times your child was sick. Did it turn out to be separation anxiety or constipation? Could symptoms be due to allergies, or the result of a change in diet or bedtime from the day before?

Compassion

Compassion does not mean we cater to every whim, but it does mean we try to put ourselves in the place of the child. If you have ruled out benign causes for the symptoms and you are pretty sure your child is sick, your next step is to decide if this illness warrants a day home from school. Some children spend their childhoods going from one cold to the next. Not every bug needs to interrupt learning or your work schedule.

Sometimes symptoms make the answer clear, but it's often a tough call.

Compassion dictates that you try to



imagine things from the view point of your child. You may function at work with a frequent cough, but that same cough might make learning and playing a huge chore for your child. Often, one day of rest can help the symptoms resolve themselves more quickly. If your child's immune system has a day to recover, the next cold bug might have a tougher time establishing itself. One day at home could mean fewer days missed later and a better learner when returning to school.

Consideration

Consideration involves taking into account the other children and adults who will be working and playing with your child. A relatively minor cold in one child can result in a breathing treatment at a hospital for another.

Because of the ways they play, their

The work of healing belongs to our heavenly Father. He has given us the responsibility of caring for our children, under His guidance.

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tendency to stay in close proximity to each other, and the fact that they are still learning hygiene, children spread illnesses very easily. They are the favorite mode of transportation for viruses and bacteria.

Consideration means you treat others as you would have them treat you. If you would prefer that your child not be exposed to anymore viruses than would normally be expected, than please assume that others feel the same. It's not easy for most people to miss work and no one wants to see their child unnecessarily ill.

Certain symptoms make the decision whether or not to stay home for you. Check your child's symptoms with the following list:

▶ Fever of 100.4 degrees or more within the last 24 hours. Please note, your child is not considered "fever free" if the fever is reduced by fever medications. Illnesses are usually contagious when a fever is present.

▶ Children should be vomit-free for 24 hours. This means keeping at least two sequential meals down.

▶ Children should be diarrhea-free for 24 hours, also. Diarrhea and vomiting at school or childcare are scary and humiliating for a child. These symptoms also indicate a strong likelihood that the illness is contagious.

▶ An early cough could indicate that the virus can be spread. Sometimes a cough will hang on for days after a cold is gone and does not necessarily mean the child needs to stay home. However, a frequent cough does wear a child down. A cough that produces mucus is a good candidate for a day at home.

▶ A sore throat with a fever, lethargy and possible white spots on the throat should be checked by a doctor. Strep infections are very contagious, very common and can lead to serious illness. A positive strep test requires that your child stay away from other children for at least 24 hours

after starting medication.

▶ Eyes that are mattered shut (even after you first wash the face in the morning) with eyelids that are red and inflamed should be checked by a doctor.

▶ Unexplained scratching or rashes should be investigated. Head lice needs to be thoroughly treated before a child can return. Other skin rashes could be impetigo (bacteria infection), ringworm (a fungus infection), or scabies (microscopic mites.). It is also good to rule out chickenpox.

While asthma and allergies and other illnesses such as diabetes and epilepsy are not contagious, they do require special attention from parents, teachers, and caregivers. Be sure the workers at your child's school or center are aware of your child's condition, are taking steps to avoid an attack, know what medications your child requires and how to administer them, and have a detailed plan for how to handle attacks and emergencies.

It is the burden of the parent to make sure the school or center is informed. Do not assume that they know what to do. It's also

good to check that multiple adults in your child's life such as recess monitors, music teachers, and substitute care givers are aware of your child's health needs.

One more thing to consider is your availability during the day, should your child need your attention while at school or child care. Most schools and centers require a yearly registration where contact forms are checked. However, family changes, moves, employment changes, or even phone number changes are not unusual during the school year. Keep your school or center informed of these changes.

Make sure that your information for back-up contacts is also current. In some cases, a school may be forced to call an ambulance if no one can be contacted.

"I am the LORD, who heals you."

Ex. 15:26

As children of God, we know that the work of healing belongs to our heavenly Father. He loves our children and wants and knows what is best for them. He has given us the awesome responsibility of caring for our children, under His guid-



ance.

When your child is sick, your first reaction might be frustration.

With God's help, you can regroup and focus on this unique opportunity to model compassion for your child, who depends on you for every kind of care. It is a blessing to be able to give that care when needed.

For Discussion:

- ▶ What do you remember about your childhood illnesses?
- ▶ What actions taken by your parents or other care givers were the most effective?
- ▶ What differences do you see in the way your child reacts to illness than the way you reacted or siblings react?
- ▶ What helps your child the most? Do siblings require different responses?

For Further Study:

- ▶ www.listentoyourbuds.org
Check the Web site for your states' Department of Health for guidelines on when a child should stay home and information on illnesses common to your area.

Treat others as you would have them treat you. If you would prefer your child not be exposed to viruses, than please assume that others feel the same.

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