

Soothing Sick Kids

THERE'S A MOTHER IN THE pediatric intensive care unit who wants to talk about a kit she received," the nurse told me. "Something about it made her cry."

I've been a child-life specialist at the Cleveland Clinic Children's Hospital since 2000. I help families understand diagnoses and treatment plans and manage the ups and downs that come with caring for a sick child. Tough talks with parents are part of the job.

Still, I was nervous. The kits the nurse was talking about were something I had recently introduced to the hospital: Comfort Kits from Guideposts. They were supposed to make a child's experience here easier, not upsetting. When I came across the kits at a conference, I fell in love with them. A treasure chest of items designed not only to entertain kids, but to soothe and inspire them. There's a coloring book, a stress ball, a CD of relaxing music, a plush star named Sparkle, a journal, a prayer card and much more. I really believed these kits would help kids. I prayed I hadn't been mistaken.

At the patient's room in PICU I saw a little girl, sleeping soundly, surrounded

by tubes and machines. My eyes met her mother's. The kit was open on her lap and tears were running down her cheeks.

"I'm Shannon. I manage the Child Life Department," I said. "I'm sorry if the kit upset you. It's a new item..."



SUPPLYING HOPE She helps kids—and parents.

The mother shook her head. "This has been one of the worst days of my life. I felt so scared and alone. Then I was handed this box. I know it's for my daughter, but it's just the reassurance I needed. I wanted to say thank you."

With that I knew the Comfort Kits belonged here. We've been using them for almost three years now. Each child who's admitted to the hospital receives one. Every day I see kids coloring, journaling, playing with Sparkle. But as this mom showed me Comfort Kits aren't just for kids. The hope they bring—which can be in short supply in hospitals sometimes—is felt by the whole family.

SHANNON SONNHALTER
Cleveland, Ohio



To learn more, visit the Comfort Kits Facebook page at facebook.com/comfortkits