

# Helping your child cope with pain

## Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at [rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net).

All children will undergo some painful medical procedure when they are growing up, such as having blood taken or immunisations. Often children and their families find these procedures stressful and upsetting.

Children look to their parents when they are in pain. They pick up on their parents' emotions and behaviours when coping with pain. In stressful situations children look to their parents for clues on how to make sense and understanding of what is happening to them. This means that, as a parent, you can make a real difference to how your child understands and copes with pain or painful procedures.

## Before the procedure

**Remain calm and control any anxiety you may feel.** Your child may be frightened and you need to remain calm for them. Be aware of your facial expressions and non-verbal behaviour. If you gasp, flinch or cringe, your child may become more frightened. Your child will draw strength from your calm reaction and will be better able to cope with their pain.

**Take time to explain** the procedure to your child in a way that they can understand. Use simple language appropriate for their age.

**Ask** your child whether they have any questions about the procedure. It is important that they are given the time to have their questions answered. Not knowing can make the pain of the procedure feel worse.

**Answer** questions honestly. If a procedure is likely to hurt, tell them it may hurt, but emphasise all the things that will be done to help them.

**Offer your child control.** Let your child choose which arm to use for a blood test or immunisation.

## During the procedure

**Make physical contact** with your child. For example cuddling, touching or letting them squeeze your hand. Do not restrain your child during a procedure.

**Control** the amount and frequency of reassurance that you give your child. If you give too much it may give them the message that something is serious and will cause them to become more anxious and worried.

**Be aware** of your own negative thoughts and mental images and replace them with positive ones.

**Respect and respond** to your child's way of coping with a situation. Some children like to be distracted with toys, books or by using their imagination.

**Encourage your child to take deep, slow breaths and "blow the pain away."** This will help them to relax.

**Use your child's imagination.** Children like to use their imagination when coping with pain. Encourage your child to imagine their favourite place, activity, colours and smells, and ask them to describe them out loud. Stories are also useful. Your child can add comments and details to make a story their own.

## What to say and how to say it

You can be sympathetic to your child and their experience of pain, and also choose your words carefully to express your feelings in a way that is positive and helpful. Distracting words, mild humour and firm suggestions will work and will help ease their pain.

**Use positive language** and encourage your child to do the same. Say, for example, "you are such a brave girl. I know that you will be fine." This helps your child to focus positively on how well they are doing.

## After the procedure:

**Praise your child** for getting through the procedure. Tell them how proud you are. Younger children like simple rewards such as stickers and badges.

**Get back to a normal routine soon** after the procedure. Procedures are a part of normal childhood – they need not be the focus. If your child dwells on the procedure, they can usually be helped by talking about it through play.

## Further information

If you need further information or have questions, please contact the Acute Pain Team via hospital switchboard on 01271 322577.

## Reference

The information on this leaflet was adapted from WellChild "helping your child cope with everyday pain" and "helping your child cope with painful medical procedures".

For more information, visit [www.wellchild.org.uk](http://www.wellchild.org.uk)

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## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email [rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## **Have your say**

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

Tell us about your experience of our services. Share your feedback on the Care Opinion website [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

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