



## Young patients' Coping and Distraction strategies

How can medical and healthcare professionals assist?

### Issues to pay attention to when meeting young patients/ parents

- When meeting young patients or parents, there are important considerations to keep in mind. Put yourselves in the shoes of young patients to understand their perspective.
- Meeting strangers can be intimidating for them, so introducing yourselves helps establish trust.
- Only present options when they are available to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings for parents.
- Avoid comparing young patients, as they face physical and mental challenges during hospitalisation. Some may need readmission, which is normal.
- Avoid making unattainable promises, like assuring that an injection will be the last.
- Don't make assumptions about young patients' coping skills based on their appearance.

### Communication with young patients: Effective Language Use

- Avoid using vague terms like "pain" since it is subjective. Instead, use descriptive alternatives. For example, you can say, "Some patients may feel a sensation like..." or "Others may experience..."
- Refrain from using medical jargon or complex terminology that may confuse young patients and their parents.
- Avoid phrases like "learn to be a big girl/boy" or "big girls/boys don't cry" as they can be dismissive and discouraging.
  - Remember not to make assumptions based on young patients' appearances. Being tall does not necessarily indicate maturity. Misconceptions like these can add unnecessary pressure to young patients. They may express negative emotions during medical procedures, which they cannot control.
  - Provide young patients with achievable goals, such as "Your job now is to stay still. You can say 'ouch' or even cry, but you cannot move around."
- Take the time to explain the medical procedures to young patients, even if they are infants. They can sense changes in your tone and demeanour. Always communicate about the procedures before carrying them out.
- Avoid lying to young patients, for example, by saying "this doesn't hurt." Being truthful and transparent builds trust and maintains their confidence in you.

## Assisting with Medical Procedures

- You can provide objects or methods that are soothing.
  - Provide soothing objects or methods. This can include offering blankets, stuffed animals, or dummies to help young patients feel more at ease.
  - Engage in comforting gestures such as holding their hands, stroking their hair, or using comforting words. This can help parents or adult patients feel more comfortable and supported.
  - Offer choices to young patients, allowing them to decide if they want to observe the medical procedure. Empowering them with a sense of control can alleviate anxiety.
  - Consider providing rewards or incentives after the completion of medical procedures. This can serve as positive reinforcement and encourage cooperation.
- Parents can play an active role as comforters during medical procedures and offer assistance in the treatment room. Their presence can provide a sense of security and support.
- Ensure that young patients are placed in a comfortable location before and during the procedure.
  - Do not lower young patients
  - Sit on knees
  - Avoid lowering them or putting them in a vulnerable position, as lying down can be unsettling (imagine you are lying on the operation bed )
  - Demonstrating with a doll can help young patients understand the preferred sitting upright position
  - Babies of a very young age should be wrapped up

## Preparations before Medical Procedures

- Provide young patients with a safe environment.
  - Conduct operations in treatment rooms if possible. Remember which zones are considered safe for the patient, for example playroom.

## When young patients are in Pain, you can...

- Validate their feelings and acknowledge their difficult situation by saying, "I understand that you're in a very difficult situation right now." This shows empathy and lets them know that their pain is recognised and understood.
- Offer stickers or plasters with different patterns as a distraction or source of comfort. These small gestures can help provide a positive focus and create a sense of relief for

young patients.

- Remind young patients that the medical procedure or operation is not their fault
- It's important not to take it personally if young patients become unenthusiastic or distant towards you after the operation.
- If you have concerns about young patients' ability to cope with or recover from the operation, it is advisable to inform child life specialists.