



Helping Preschool Age Children Cope with Pain

Below are some of the non pharmacological pain management strategies that may be helpful for preschool age children depending on their individual developmental needs, medical status and caregiver availability.

Preschool Development

3 - 6 Years Old

- Preschool age children learn by exploring, playing, and engaging in socializing activities.
- Preschool age children have a fear of loss of control and need to develop a sense of power by mastering skills through play.
- Preschool age children gain self-esteem from feeling capable and demonstrating new skills.
- Preschool age children are developing control over their bodies and the environment and expect normal routine. Disruption in normal routine and unfamiliar environments may be troubling to development.
- Preschool age children learn to trust themselves from trusting the environment and people around them. They look to caregivers and familiar people for guidance, security, and support.

How Preschoolers Perceive & Express Pain

Preschool-age children may hesitate to admit pain if they view it as a punishment, or fear the treatment.

- This time in a child's development allows for great opportunities to set the stage for positive experiences that will shape future experiences.
- Experiences of severe restriction, changes in routine, feelings of unpredictability, and loss of control may cause preschoolers to regress to earlier and more secure developmental levels.
- Pain is a personal experience that can often be difficult for a child to express. Share with the medical team known words ("owie;" "booboo;" "ouchie;" "hurt") and/or signs your child uses to communicate pain.

Helping Preschoolers Cope

- **Familiar Person/Parental Presence**
 - Include parents or familiar person in preparation, comfort holds, and distraction/support as it allows the child to feel safe
- **Preparation/Medical Play**
 - Explain procedure in simple correct language
 - Provide sensory information, opportunity for medical play or preparation shortly before procedure
 - Use direct approach and speak eye level with child
 - Incorporate play as effective stress reduction and opportunity for education

Helping Preschoolers Cope (continued)

- **Offer Appropriate Choices**
 - Allow option to watch procedure if child is interested or pick coping strategy
 - Allow option to sit on bed or chair or with caregiver
- **Comfort Positions**
 - Offer opportunities to provide a supportive hold versus restraining the child. This reduces stress and provides comfort to the patient during procedures.
 - **“The Hugging Hold”**- this position allows for the child and adult to be in a “hugging hold”. The hold can be used facing the procedure or facing away, using distraction (give the child the choice to look or to be distracted).
- **One Voice**
 - Allow for one voice heard during procedure to limit excessive noise
- **Positive Reinforcement**
 - Offer encouragement and praise; continue to use simple language throughout procedure “small poke”, “great listener.”



Distraction During A Painful Procedure

Active distraction allows the preschooler to be involved in the experience while re-directing their attention towards an item/activity.

- **Slow, rhythmic breathing- Bubbles, toy whistles, party blowers, pinwheels, harmonicas**
- **“Blowing shot pain away”**
 - **Blow out air repeatedly during injection as if they were blowing bubbles**
- **Utilizing light up toys or interactive toys**
- **Tablet**
- **I spy books/sheets**
- **Sing songs, playing music**

Rollins, J. (2005). Meeting Children's Psychosocial Needs. Texas: Pro-Ed.

Please call your Child Life Specialist for further non pharmacological pain management strategies and support for medical procedures at 312.227.3270.

