



# Helping Toddlers Cope with Pain

*Below are some of the non pharmacological pain management strategies that may be helpful to help toddlers depending on their individual developmental needs, medical status and caregiver availability.*

## Toddler Development

*1- 3 Years Old*

- Toddlers learn by moving, exploring, playing, and engaging in socializing activities.
- Toddlers 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.
- Toddlers 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 Toddlers Perceive Pain

*Toddlers are able to remember painful procedures and may respond to similar tests and routines with physical resistance and uncooperativeness (Pearson,2005).*

- 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 toddlers to regress to earlier and more secure developmental levels.
- Nonverbal behaviors, such as facial expressions, limb movements, grasping, holding, and crying are considered more reliable indicators of pain than verbal responses.

## Helping Toddlers Cope

*Toddlers often understand far more than they are able to express in words...subsequently they benefit from preparation and support for painful procedures (Pearson,2005).*

- **Familiar Person/Parental Presence** (separation anxiety)
  - Include parents or familiar person in preparation, comfort holds, and distraction/support as it allows the toddler to feel safe
- **Offer Appropriate Choices**
  - Pick the type of coping strategy that the toddler wants to participate in, a song they want to be sung, or help put the band aid on after the procedure

*(Helping toddlers cope continued on other side)*

## Helping toddlers cope (continued)

- **Comfort Positions**
  - Offer opportunities to provide a supportive hold versus restraining the child. This reduces stress and provides comfort to the patient during procedures
- **Positive Reinforcement**
  - Offer reward or tangible item after painful procedure, continue to use simple language throughout procedure “small poke”, “great listener.”
- **Allow for Play Opportunities**
  - Play may help toddler feel safe again, as this is often a familiar experience
- **Utilize Security Objects**
  - Blankets, favorite toys, items from home
- **Preparation**
  - Provide sensory information, opportunity for medical play or preparation shortly before procedure



## Distraction During A Painful Procedure

*Active distraction allows the toddler to be involved in the experience while diverting their attention towards an item/activity*

- **Blowing Bubbles-** can help facilitate deep breathing
- **Utilizing light up toys or interactive toys**
- **Reading a book**
- **Sing songs, playing music**
- **Coloring books**

*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.*