



Helping Preschool Age Children Cope with Pain

In addition to medications, preschool-age children may benefit from using these strategies to manage pain that is unique to their developmental needs, medical status, and caregiver availability.

How Preschoolers *Develop*: 3-6 Year Olds

- Preschool age children learn by exploring, playing, and engaging in activities to socialize with their peers.
- Preschool age children fear having no control. They develop a sense of power by mastering skills through play.
- Preschool age children gain self-esteem from feeling capable and by demonstrating new skills.
- Preschool age children are developing control over their bodies and expect normal routine in their environment. 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 and Express* Pain

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

- A preschooler's development allows for opportunities to create positive experiences that will help to shape future experiences.
- Experiencing severe restrictions, changes in routine, feelings of unpredictability, and/or the loss of control may cause preschoolers to regress to earlier and more secure levels of their development.
- Pain is a personal experience that can be difficult for a child to express. Share with the medical team any 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 a familiar person in preparation, comforting holds for support, and distraction as it allows the child to feel safe
- **Preparation/Medical Play**
 - Explain procedures using simple, honest language
 - Provide sensory information with an opportunity for medical play to prepare for the procedure
 - Speak at eye-level with the child
 - Incorporate play to reduce stress and create an opportunity for education

Helping Preschoolers *Cope* (continued)

- **Offer Appropriate Choices**
 - Provide an option to watch the procedure, if the child is interested
 - Allow the option for the child to sit on a bed or chair with a caregiver
- **Comfort Positions**
 - Offer opportunities to provide a supportive hold, instead of restraining the child. This reduces stress and provides comfort 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 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 throughout the procedure, and continue to use simple language like “a small poke”, “you are a 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 or 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 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.