



# Helping Toddlers Cope with Pain

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

## How Toddlers *Develop*: 1-3 Year Olds

- 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 opportunities to create positive experiences that will help shape future experiences.
- Experiences of severe restriction, changes in routine, feelings of unpredictability, and/or loss of control may cause toddlers to regress to earlier and more secure levels of development.
- Non-verbal behaviors like 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**
  - Include parents or a familiar person in preparation, comforting holds for support, and distraction as it allows the toddler to feel safe
- **Offer Appropriate Choices**
  - Pick the type of coping strategy that the toddler wants to participate in – sing a song, or help put the Band-Aid on after the procedure

## Helping Toddlers *Cope* (continued)

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