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

Toddors 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

Toddors 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


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