

## Helping your child cope with everyday pain...

**Most children will experience pain from time to time in everyday life. The more active children become, the more likely they are to fall off their bicycles, bump into things, tumble in the playground, or hurt themselves whilst they play. The occasional toothache, earache and stomach ache are other likely causes of everyday pain.**

Children may find pain upsetting and not know how to cope with it, even if it is just caused by minor scrapes or cuts. Research has shown that some children may become more sensitive to pain the more frequently it occurs. Also, parents are not always there when children get hurt, so it is important that children learn how they can help themselves with minor everyday pain.

Children look to their parents when they are in pain. They pick up on their parents' emotions and behaviours when coping with pain. You can help your child by setting a good example.

### Setting an 'emotional' example:

**Remain calm and control any anxiety you may feel.** Your child may be frightened and you need to remain calm for them. Your child needs to see that you are in control. Be aware of your facial expression and non-verbal behaviour. If you gasp, flinch, or cringe, your child may become more frightened. Your child will draw strength from your calm reaction and will be better able to cope with their pain. If you feel yourself getting tense or anxious, breathe slowly and deeply and relax your jaw and posture.

**Support your child.** Tell your child that you are there to help and that you will get through the pain together. Tell your child that the pain will go away. If you are not sure why they are in pain, ask them to explain where the pain is and how it happened.

**Use your child's imagination.** Children like to use their imagination and this can help them cope with pain. Ask your child to first picture the pain and then to imagine the pain shrinking away or changing colour as it gets better. You can also teach your child how to relax by encouraging them to

imagine that they are in a favourite place or taking part in a favourite activity). Ask them to go into detail and describe out loud what they are imagining (colours, sounds, smells, tastes, feelings).

**Learning from accidents.** Tell your child that it was an accident. Children who blame themselves for their injuries are more likely to be upset and distressed. Later, when they are calm, explain how they can prevent accidents like this from happening again.

### Setting a 'behavioural' example:

**Take a deep breath.** Teach your child to take deep breaths and to deliberately exhale to 'blow the pain away'. Keep a bottle of bubbles handy, as younger children will find it easier to blow bubbles than to exhale. This will also distract your child and will help them to release any muscular tension that can make the pain worse.

**Make contact with your child.** Comfort your child by cuddling, hugging, holding hands, touching, stroking or patting their back. Older children may hold the hurt part of their body or become very quiet and still when in pain. This is a coping skill that they have learnt from other people such as their parents.

**How painful is it?** Encourage your child to always tell you – or another adult – if they have pain. Some children may not want to tell someone they are in pain because they are afraid of taking medicine or have to go to the doctor or to hospital.

**Teach your child how to measure pain.** Children can be easily taught to tell you how bad their pain is. For young children, use simple language that is familiar to them. For example: "Is it a big ouch or a small ouch?" "Now that we have the plaster on it, is the hurt less or the same?" Older children (usually 7 or older) can rate the intensity of the pain on a scale of 0 to 10 – 0 being "no pain" and 10 being "the worst pain." At a time when your child is not in pain, ask them to think of times where they had different pains and to give pain ratings. Then, when your child says his scraped knee is a 5, compared to the 7 when he fell

off his bike, and the 10 when he had stitches, you will have a better understanding of what the pain feels like for your child, and that will help you decide what to do next.

**Water and ice.** Run cool water over your child's cuts and scrapes. This will help to clean the injury. You can also help them to imagine that the water is helping to 'wash the pain away'. Putting ice to your child's injury will help with the pain and reduce any swelling.

**Use a plaster.** Cover your child's cuts and scrapes. This protects the wound and removes the constant visual reminder of the accident and the pain – out of sight, out of mind. Fun, colourful plasters are often a source of pride for younger children and gives them something to show and tell from their painful experience.

### What to say and how to say it:

**You can be sympathetic** to your child and their experience of pain, and also **choose your words carefully** to express your feelings in a way that is **positive and helpful**. Distracting words, mild humour and firm suggestions to use the coping actions such as imagination and deep breathing do work and will help ease their pain.

Use positive language and encourage your child to do the same. Say, for example, "You are such a brave girl, I know that you will be fine." This helps your child to focus positively on how well she can cope with her pain rather than on how bad the pain feels. Remind your child about how well they coped when they had pain before. Remind them that the **pain will go away...**

### Want to know more?

[www.gosh.nhs.uk/cpap/resources/links.html](http://www.gosh.nhs.uk/cpap/resources/links.html)

[pediatric-pain.ca/links.html](http://pediatric-pain.ca/links.html)

WellChild Helpline: Tel 0845 122 86 36,

Email: [helpline@wellchild.org.uk](mailto:helpline@wellchild.org.uk), Text: 0778 147 2599

[www.childrenshealth.org.uk](http://www.childrenshealth.org.uk)

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