

Fact Sheet

Children's Pain – The Facts



Very young children or children who are very sick cannot always tell us exactly what they are feeling. This can be quite distressing for parents who may feel confused about what their child is experiencing. Parents know their child's usual reactions and behaviours.

What is pain?

Many things affect a child's experience of pain:-

- Their age.
- Their beliefs and understanding of what is causing the pain.
- Their beliefs in their own ability to cope.
- Their previous pain experiences and how they have seen other people dealing with pain.
- How they have learned to respond to pain.

How long does pain last?

Acute pain

The term "acute pain" refers to pain that is not long-lasting. The pain may be caused by an operation, injury, illness, or medical procedure. Depending on what has caused the pain, the pain may last a few seconds (eg. a needle) through to a few weeks or months (eg. following an injury). Some pain from an operation is normal and is a part of the whole healing process. Acute pain can be helped with medications, which can be given by various methods. You can also help your child with acute pain by using non-drug methods such as relaxation and distraction techniques.

Chronic pain

Chronic pain lasts for a longer period of time, usually longer than 3-6

months. This pain can be constant or come and go at different times. It is sometimes difficult to find a cause for chronic pain. However there are treatments and special programs that can help your child cope better with chronic pain.

How do you know your child is in pain?

It is not always easy to know how much pain your child is experiencing, listening to what they say and watching what they do can help us.

Things that can show that your child is in pain include:-

- Crying.
- Facial changes or pulling a face.
- Changes in their sleeping or eating patterns.
- Becoming quiet and withdrawn.
- Screaming.
- Refusing to move.

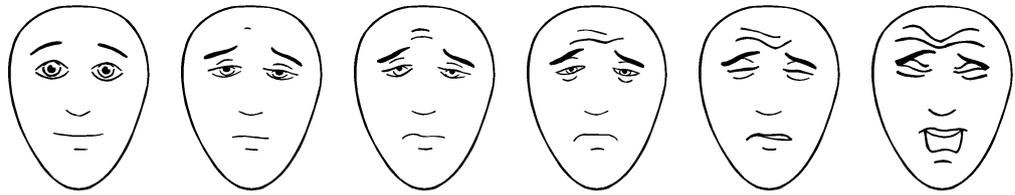
Some children may tell us they are sore or hurting but may find it difficult to say how much they are hurting.

Remember that changes in their behaviour can also occur because they are scared or frightened.

Children can use a scale such as the Faces Pain Scale - Revised below. This will involve asking your child to point to the face that shows how much hurt they are feeling from "no pain" on the left through to "very much pain" on the right.

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Faces Pain Scale - Revised. ©2001 IASP.

www.painsourcebook.ca

Hicks CL, von Baeyer CL, Spafford P, van Korlaar I, Goodenough (2001)

Remember

- Parents are often the best judges of their child's pain.
- Listen to what they tell you and watch what they do.
- If worried or in doubt about your child's pain, talk to your local doctor or if you are in hospital, a nurse or doctor.
- If you are unsure of whether or not to give any medication for your child's pain, it is best to get advice from your doctor or pharmacist.

More information on helping children cope with painful procedures is available from the following web-site:

<http://pediatric-pain.ca/content/Families>

This fact sheet is for education purposes only.
Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for your child.

This document was reviewed on 11th June 2010.

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