

# FACTSHEET

This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professionals to make sure this information is right for your child. If you would like to provide feedback on this fact sheet, please visit: [www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/feedback-form](http://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/feedback-form).

## Children's pain –The facts

Young children or children who are sick cannot always tell us exactly what they are feeling. This can be quite upsetting for parents who may feel confused about what their child is experiencing. Parents know their child's usual reactions and behaviours, but sometimes pain and fear may change these reactions.

### What impacts on pain?

Many things affect your child's experience of pain:

- Your child's age.
- Your child's beliefs and understanding about the cause of the pain.
- Your child's beliefs in his/her ability to cope.
- Your child's previous experiences with pain and how they have seen other people deal with pain.
- Your child's learned responses 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 (e.g. a needle) through to a few weeks or months (e.g. following an injury). Some pain from an operation is normal and is a part of the healing process. Acute pain can be reduced by medications that can be given a number of ways. You can also help your child with acute pain by using other strategies such as relaxation and distraction techniques.

#### Persistent or chronic pain

Persistent or chronic pain is any pain that lasts for a longer period of time, beyond the expected time of healing. This pain can be persistent (continuing), or come and go at different times. Not all persistent pain has an identifiable cause; however most persistent pain is treated the same whether there is an identifiable cause that does not have specific treatment or no cause has been found which may include medication, movement and/or using non-medicine strategies for managing the pain.

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## How do you know your child is in pain?

It is not always easy to know how much pain your child is feeling, but listening to what they say and watching what they do can help you assess it.

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

- Crying
- Facial changes or pulling a face such as a grimace or frown
- Changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Becoming quiet and/or withdrawn
- Screaming
- Refusing to move
- Overall change in their function

Remember that changes in a child's behaviour can also happen if they are scared or anxious.

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

There are a variety of pain scales used for children depending on their age and their cognitive level. For children aged 4-7 can use a scale such as the "Faces Pain Scale – Revised" or the FLACC (see appendix). The Faces scale is recommended for children 4-7 years, to use you ask 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. You can tell staff which number face your child has pointed to and that will help them to know how your child is feeling. The FLACC is mostly used for children aged 1-4 years, each category, requires a score of either 0, 1, or 2 and add them up for a score out of 10. This number will help you to explain your child's pain to staff, or the nursing staff will perform the FLACC assessment. There is a modified FLACC for children with intellectual difficulties which nursing staff will also perform the assessment on.

### Remember:

- Parents are often the best judge of their child's pain.
- Listen to what your child is telling you, watch how they are behaving
- If you are 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 not sure about whether or not to give any medication for your child's pain, it is best to get advice from your doctor or a pharmacist.

More information on helping children cope with chronic pain is available from the following web-site:  
<https://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/chronic-pain/for-everyone>

# Appendix: The FLACC and Faces revised Pain Assessment Scales

The FLACC Behavioural Pain Assessment Scale			
Categories	scoring		
	0	1	2
Face	No particular expression or smile	Occasional grimace or frown, withdrawn, disinterested	Frequent to constant quivering chin, clenched jaw, _____ *
Legs	Normal position or relaxed	Uneasy, restless, tense	Kicking, or legs drawn up, _____ *
Activity	Lying quietly, normal position, moves easily	Squirming, shifting back and forth, tense	Arched, rigid or jerking, _____ *
Cry	No cry (asleep or awake)	Moans or whimpers, occasional complaint	Crying steadily, screams or sobs, frequent complaints, _____ *
Consolability	Contented, relaxed	Reassured by occasional touching, hugging or being talked to, distractible	Difficult to console or comfort, _____ *

From *The FLACC: A behavioral scale for scoring postoperative pain in young children*, by S Merkel and others, 1997, *Pediatr Nurse* 23(3), p. 293-297. Copyright 1997 by Jannetti Co. University of Michigan Medical Center.

\* insert behaviours typically seen when this child is hurt

Faces Pain Scale - Revised. ©2001 IASP. [www.painsourcebook.ca](http://www.painsourcebook.ca)

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