

# Helping your child cope with **pain**

**Psychological resource  
for parents and carers**



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## Introduction

Around 25% of young people experience recurrent pain for over three months. It is also common for children to undergo some painful medical procedures when they are growing up, such as blood tests or vaccinations. Both children and their families can find these experiences of pain stressful and difficult to cope with. As a parent, you can help how your child understands and manages pain.

## Comfort and Support

Pain may feel worse when your child is tense or anxious, so providing support and comfort can help. For medical procedures, it may be helpful to explain the reason for their procedure and what to expect, as this can give young people a sense of understanding and control.

Praising your child's strengths may support them through the pain. Children may also find reassurance from positive touch, such as being stroked or cuddled. You can also ask your child if they would like to squeeze or hold your hand. Behaviours such as crying or shouting can be normal when we experience pain, we encourage parents to let children know that this is okay.

## Model Calm and Confident

Children often look to parents as "role models" for cues on how to act during stressful situations. They can be sensitive to your feelings and behaviour. It is understandable to find it difficult to see your child in pain, but you can help them by modelling calmness and confidence.

Children notice our body language. Your child may become more scared if they pick up on reactions such as flinching. Try to ease any tension in your posture and gently relax your jaw. Take slow breaths and remind yourself that you are doing your best for them.

## The RUH, where you matter

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## Distractions

Directing your child's attention away from pain may be helpful. Encourage them to concentrate on something else that they may engage well with. Think about what your child likes and, if possible, involve them in choosing something they would like to focus on.

Some ideas for distractions may include:

- **Toys** – Parents may consider providing fidget toys, bubbles, or the child's favourite toys. This may be more suitable for younger children.
- **Activities** – Some ideas include listening to music, reading, watching a video, using a tablet, or playing a game.

## Guided Imagination

Another technique to help your child cope with pain is encouraging them to practice guided imagination. You can let your child pick their favourite occasion or an imaginary place and talk them through it. Ask about what they can see, hear, touch, smell, and taste.



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## Further Help

If your child needs more help to manage a procedure, please speak to their paediatrician or the ward staff (if an inpatient) about our Health Play Specialist service.

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If you would like this leaflet in email form, large print, braille or another language, please contact the Patient Support and Complaints team on 01225 825656.

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