

Language

The language used in hospital is often unfamiliar and may be ambiguous and frightening for children and teenagers. Words that have different meanings can be confusing and therefore increase anxiety. To develop an understanding and ultimately help children cope, it is helpful to:

- Use a calm, unhurried and confident voice when explaining treatments and cares
- Use correct names of body parts and relate to the child in language they use at home and understand
- Provide opportunities for children and teenagers to ask questions, express their thoughts, concerns and feelings
- Consider cultural aspects
- Acknowledge children's feelings and validate them
- Be developmentally appropriate

E.g. Ambiguous: "The doctor will give you some dye" (*To make me die???*)

Clearer: "The doctor will put some medicine in the tube that will help to be able to see your_____ more clearly".

Ambiguous: "I.C.U." (*I see you???*)

Clearer: Describe in simple terms and explain what the letters stand for.

Ambiguous: "We will put you to sleep to..." (*Like the cat that went to the vet and never came back!*)

Clearer: "We will give you some special sleeping medicine to help you go into a very deep sleep; you won't feel anything until the operation is over; then the doctor will stop giving you the medicine so you can wake up"

Words can decrease or increase the perceived threat of a situation

E.g. Harder: This part will hurt
Softer: (you) may feel achy, scratchy, tight, snug, full or (other manageable descriptive terms)

Harder: The medicine will taste bad
Softer: The medicine will taste different than anything you have tasted before. After you take it you can tell me how it was for you?

Information from: Gaynard, L., Wolfer, J. Goldberger, J., Thompson, R., Redburn, L. and laidley, L. (1990). *Psychosocial care of children in hospitals: A clinical practice manual from the ACCH child life research project. Association for the Care of Children's Health.*