

Play and development

Play in hospital is internationally recognised as second only to the support of a family member in hospital, in helping a child manage and cope with the impact of hospitalisation.

Play is a valuable tool to:

- maintain normal growth and development
- help children and teenagers understand what will happen to them while in hospital and to assist in developing coping strategies prior to treatments
- provide information on children's growth and development
- provide information on how children and young people cope with illness, treatment and hospitalisation
- maintain normalisation and familiar surroundings

The following is a list of development information including stresses in hospital, interventions and ideas for preparing children and teenagers for tests/procedures:

Birth – 12 months

Stresses:

Separation from parents

Sensitivity to abnormal stimulation such as bright lights, sounds e.t.c

Stranger anxiety

Interventions:

Having a consistent caregiver

Incorporating daily routines from home

Limit tactile stimulation

Support for tests and procedures:

Involve family who can comfort the child at times of stress using comfort positioning

Talk before touching

1-3 years

Stresses:

Separation from parents

Regression of newly acquired skills

Concern about injury/pain

Loss of autonomy

Interventions:

Having a consistent caregiver

Incorporating daily routines from home
Limit tactile stimulation
Talk before touching

Support for tests and procedures:

Involve family who can comfort the child at times of stress using comfort positioning
Give sensory information about the procedure
Provide alternative focus and involve the child in procedures
Give older children an opportunity to engage in healthcare play

3 - 5 years

Stresses:

Long separation and medical procedures seen as punishment
Fear of bodily mutilation, blood, the dark and being left alone
Misconception of words
Poor concept of time
Magical thinking

Interventions:

Having a consistent caregiver
Participate in care as appropriate
Reassure they are not to blame for illness
Concrete explanations

Support for tests and procedures:

Give the child choices when appropriate, e.g. "Would you like the medicine on a spoon or in a cup?"
Give the child a role in procedure "your job is to keep your arm still" Develop coping strategies such as blowing bubbles
Provide opportunities for children to engage in medical play and role playing

6 - 11 years

Stresses:

Compromised body image, concern about anaesthesia
Invasion of privacy
Concern of loss of control/pain
Have increasing ability to understand rules, concept of fairness and cooperation with others.

Interventions:

Allow participation in care as appropriate
Set limits and provide structure
Promote a sense of responsibility
Encourage parental participation

To prepare for tests and procedures:

Give explanations with details regarding their body and impact on their appearance
Use coping strategies such visual imagery, music and “where’s wally” during procedures

Teenagers

Stresses:

Loss of body image and control
Loss of mobility/body functions
Loss of peer acceptance
Death

Interventions:

Respect privacy and autonomy
Encourage peer interaction
Include in decision making

To prepare for tests and procedures:

Photographs are useful to support in-depth discussion.
Can be useful to hear what other teenagers find supportive and have concerns about
Honest explanations of procedures/diagnosis
Follow up discussions are important for understanding
Discuss whether to ‘watch’ or ‘not watch’ during procedure
Do they wish a caregiver to be present or not?