Distraction Techniques and the Paediatric Pain Experience

Pain is a complex phenomenon for children involving psychological, biological and sociological factors and the concepts of hospitalization and pain are often linked in the minds of children. Recent studies have demonstrated that many hospitalized children continue to have moderate to severe pain that is not well controlled. Such findings suggest that pain medication alone may not be enough and more holistic approaches may be helpful. Complementary therapies may play an important role in paediatric pain management when used in conjunction with medication. These therapies promote the physical and psychological comfort of children in pain.

Distraction is a coping strategy that works by diverting attention from a painful stimulus by passively redirecting one’s attention or actively involving the individual in a task. It uses part of someone’s attention capabilities, which leaves less attention available to perceive pain. Distraction brings benefits that are free of risk and low in cost. Distraction techniques that are multisensory, interactive and those that involved active cognitive and motor responses from the child appear to work the best!

Recently, research has provided further support for the use of distraction as an effective distress reduction strategy for children and also report direct benefits for parents and caregivers. Reports from parents and caregivers expressed that they felt less upset during times when their children were undergoing painful experiences and that both them and their child benefited from them acting as a “coach” for distraction. Parents expressed feeling more relaxed when they were able to directly help their child. Studies have also suggested that developmentally appropriate distraction activities that are highly engaging and enjoyable have the potential to effectively reduce stress in children undergoing pain.

The distraction box contains various items chosen for their ability to distract and their developmental suitability. Through the creation of a personalized “distraction box” your child will be able to choose items of interest and will be encouraged to use these items when they are feeling pain. A list of other items will be provided so you and your child can continue to build the distraction box. Through encouragement, your child can successfully learn to focus their attention away from pain and therefore improve their coping.