PLAY IS THE WAY!

Child Life Techniques for Supporting Pediatric Surgery Patients
I have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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OBJECTIVES

- Identify pediatric patients’ developmental stages, and common fears & misconceptions surrounding the surgery experience.

- Describe play-based interventions for supporting pediatric patients before surgery.

- Describe play-based interventions for supporting pediatric patients after surgery.
The psycho-social-developmental side of pediatric care.

Provided by a Certified Child Life Specialist.
- Developmental, normalizing, medical, and therapeutic play
- Procedural preparation and support
- Diagnosis teaching
- Sibling and family services
Identify the five developmental stages of pediatric patients, and common fears & misconceptions surrounding surgery.
The developmental work of an infant is building trust and attachments.
INFANTS (BIRTH TO 12 MONTHS)

- Separation
- Lack of gentle touch
The developmental work of a toddler is gaining control of their own body.
Toddlers (12 - 36 months)

- Loss of body control
- Separation
- NPO
The developmental work of a preschooler is learning to control their environment.
Loss of environmental & body control

Medical misconceptions (procedures = punishments)

Anticipatory fear with needles

NPO
The developmental work of a school aged child is developing self-confidence and self-worth.
SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN (6 - 12 YEARS)

- Anticipatory fear
- Anesthesia
- Bodily mutilation
The developmental work of an adolescent is developing a unique personal identity.
ADOLESCENTS (13+ YEARS)

- Loss of self/identity
- Body image
- Sexuality
- Peer opinion
- Fear of death
Describe play-based interventions for supporting pediatric patients before surgery.
Support infants before surgery by encouraging caregivers to hold them, and provide positive touch.
Soothing Fussy Infants

- Swaddle
- Suck
  (sucrose for needle procedures)
- Side
- Sway
- Shush
Support toddlers before surgery by helping them to feel in control.

Give them a mask to explore.

Consider a “pre-wrap” on their hand.

Provide opportunities to play.

Pre-teach parents about the “waking up angry” phenomena.
Support preschoolers before surgery by using concrete language, and watching out for medical misconceptions.

Let them explore the induction mask, and explain the IV ahead of time.

Provide opportunities to play.
GENTLE, YET HONEST, LANGUAGE

Instead of this . . .

- Pinch, sting.
- This will hurt, or, this won’t hurt.
- The procedure takes about 20 minutes.
- We’ll run IV fluids to hydrate you.
- Bigger than, longer than, more than.
- Cut, slice, open you up.

Try this . . .

- Poke.
- Some kids tell me that this part hurts a little. Afterward, you can tell me how it felt for you.
- We’ll be done in less time than it takes to watch an episode of Dora.
- We will give you water through a little straw in your arm. That will help you feel better.
- Smaller than, shorter than, less than.
- The doctor will make a small opening.
Instead of this . . .

Try this . . .

Special medicine to put you in a *deep medical-sleep.*

You won’t see anything, hear anything, feel anything, smell anything, or taste anything.
Support school age children before surgery by scaffolding success, and fostering a sense of accomplishment.

Explain the IV ahead of time.

Provide opportunities for rehearsal/reversal play.
Support adolescents before surgery by respecting privacy, talking directly to them, and remain respectfully aware of the “personal myth” phenomena.
NORMALIZATION PLAY ON SURGERY DAY

- Infants: tummy time, snuggles, reading
- Toddlers: gross motor, banging, fill/dump, reading, coloring
- Preschoolers: make believe, sorting, reading, simple crafts, coloring
- School age: board games, video games, card games, puzzles, reading, homework, crafts, coloring
- Adolescents: social media, games, (board, card, video), puzzles, reading, homework, complex crafts, coloring
Describe play-based interventions for supporting pediatric patients after surgery.
Support infants after surgery by reuniting with caregivers ASAP, and encouraging positive touch.
SOOTHING FUSSY INFANTS

- Swaddle
- Suck
- Side
- Sway
- Shush
Support toddlers after surgery by helping them to feel in control, and reuniting them with caregivers ASAP.

Provide opportunities to play.

Encourage PO with silly straws and modeling.
Support preschoolers after surgery by reuniting with caregivers ASAP.

Let them practice IV removal on a stuffed animal or caregiver.

Provide opportunities to play.

Encourage PO with silly straws, stickers, modeling, incentive charts.
Support school age children after surgery by offering quiet play, comfort items, and reunion with caregivers ASAP.

PO games are great for this age group. Try and engage the caregivers, too.
Support adolescents after surgery by remembering the “personal myth,” and be patient with the fluctuation between adult-like and child-like behavior.
Play is a child’s first tool for learning.

It is how they interact with the world, and cope with difficult experiences.


Sparks, LA, Setlik J, & Luhman J. (2007). Parental holding and positioning to decrease IV distress in young children: a randomized controlled trial. Journal of Pediatric Nursing. 22(6), 440-447