CHEO
Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario
Centre hospitalier pour enfants de l'est de l'Ontario

Helping Children Cope With Procedures

Birthday Candle Breathing

Explain to the child that taking slow deep breaths helps our body to feel better when we are nervous or feeling pain and this is an exercise to help. *"Let's pretend today is your birthday and you are turning 100. What I need you to do is take a deep breath in and when you blow out pretend you are blowing out all those birthday candles. Let's practice! Now, when I count to three, blow out those birthday candles."* Ask the child what kind of birthday cake they would have. Would there be sprinkles on it? And so on.

The Thumbs Up or Thumbs Down Game

Explain to the child that you are going to pretend to make a pizza and when you say an ingredient for the pizza ask the child to give you a thumbs up or a thumbs down if they like this ingredient. Mention things like mushrooms, anchovies, broccoli, or odd things like worms, shoelaces, etc. You can use the same exercise to make an ice cream sundae, etc.

TV Set

Explain to the child that in some ways, we can be like a TV set with many different channels inside our heads. We can have happy channels, sad channels, scary channels, funny channels, comfortable channels, etc. We can help change the channel by thinking of something else. *"Try thinking of a time you had a lot of fun or time you felt really* comfy. *Try to change to that channel*". Use the tone of your voice to help the child to relax.

Singing a Favourite Song (infants and up)

Ask parents if there is a special song their child enjoys that they can sing during the procedure. The song the Wheels on the Bus or etc. when sung in a soft, soothing voice helps to relax both the child and family.

Building a Gingerbread House

Explain to the child a story of two children who were walking in the forest one day and came upon a beautiful house made of gingerbread and special trimmings. Ask the child to imagine some of the special trimmings. What would be on the roof? What would the windows be made of? The child can talk about their favourite foods and candies that would be on the house.

Going to a Special Place

Explain to the patient that when some kids have sutures, a cast, etc. they think of a "special place" and imagine that they were there. If the child is feeling nervous and/or scared they can take a couple slow deep breaths and think of their "special place". Ask the child if their special place warm? Are there any sounds in their special place?

Jokes

Laughter is good medicine.
What did the zero say to the eight? – Nice belt!
What does a sea monster have for lunch? – Fish and ships!
Where do cows go to have fun? – To the moooovies!
What is a shark's favourite game? – Swallow the leader!

Created by the Child Life Department at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario
Some ideas are adapted from Dr. Terry Orlick's book Feeling Great. Teaching Children to Excel at Living