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

Child Friendly Language

Remember these pointers when talking with children…

* Get down to the child's eye level (especially if in a wheelchair/bed)
* Use positive wording rather than negative wording (stay still vs. don't move)
* Use medical terminology with developmentally appropriate explanations
* Speak in a soft, clear voice
* Describe how things will feel through senses ("This part may feel cool.")
* Provide encouragement ("Keep up the great deep breathing!")

Choosing Language

Ambiguous	Implications	Clear
"It's okay to cry"	Implies the child may need to cry.	When crying, give child support at that time.
"Don't Move!"	Negative wording and authoritative.	"Keep very, very still. Be like a statue."
"Stretcher"	"They're going to stretch her?"	A special bed on wheels.
"Put you to sleep"	"Like when my cat was put to sleep and never came back!"	"We will give you a special medicine that helps you to have a short sleep/nap"
"It doesn't hurt"	Implies there will be no pain	Explain sensations child may feel (cool, etc)
"Fix your arm"	Implies that the child is broken	"We will help take care of your arm."
"X-Ray"	Machine that could hurt them.	"A special camera. It takes pictures of bones/body"
"IV"	"Is that a kind of plant?"	"An IV is a tiny plastic tube that acts like a straw."
"Take your temperature"	"What are you taking from me?"	"I'm going to check to see how warm your body is"
"Blood pressure"	Can sound scary to a young child	A band that wraps around your arm/leg and gives a squeeze. It shows how well your heart is working.

Contact the CHEO child life department for more information (613) 737-7600 (ext. 2322) Oct. 2007