

Managing Procedures in Babies & Toddlers

Babies and toddlers with CF may need to undergo procedures and tests that can cause anxiety and distress. This may be caused by anticipation of pain, loud or strange noises, fear of what's happening as well as a new environment and people.

Symptoms

If your child experiences procedural anxiety, you may notice some of the following symptoms:

- Crying
- Arching back, squirming
- Scrunching face
- Screaming
- Stopping talking completely
- Hitting, kicking, or biting
- Running around the procedure room
- Hiding behind or under furniture

It is important to understand how your child might be feeling and provide plenty of comfort and reassurance. Your child's care team can help you find ways to comfort your child and build their coping skills.

Methods to Reduce Procedural Anxiety

Babies

- Breastfeeding can help comfort, distract, and decrease pain.
- [Comfort positions/clinical hold](#)- these are comforting ways to hold your child during a procedure. There are several positions depending on the child's age.
- Stroking their face, patting bottom, rocking (where appropriate).



- Dummy or other comfort item.
- Distraction techniques such as bubbles, singing, rattles or other toys.
- Swaddling and tight hugs from parent/caregiver is calming.

Toddlers

- [Comfort positions/clinical holding](#)
- Distraction techniques such as bubbles, music, singing favourite songs, playing with toys, TV/phone.
- Give your child some choice and control, keeping choice to one of two things (too much choice can be overwhelming and stress making itself).
- Your toddler is seeking security and safety – put their mind at rest that they are safe and loved by providing reassurance and hugs as much as is needed. Acknowledging their fears and then supporting them to regulate is important.
- Topical agents to numb the skin and

minimise pain e.g. EMLA cream.

- Talk to your child about the procedure beforehand, using age appropriate information and language. This can help your child feel prepared and in control.
- Deep pressure is a useful tool for calming. This can be provided via big hugs, weighted blankets or weighted heat packs. Using a comfort item at home before the hospital visit is a good way to introduce a weighted tool that the child can then use during their stay.

Parents

Babies and toddlers sense and respond to changes in their parent's emotions and demeanour. If a parent becomes stressed or anxious, their child can sense this and will mirror the emotion. This is why it's important for parents and caregivers to put aside their anxieties and worries and instead focus on calm and regulated behaviour to assist their child in feeling the same. Don't underestimate the impact you have as the parent/caregiver to your child's behaviour.

As the key caregiver it is important to be the best advocate for your child. If you feel your child is not coping with something happening in the hospital, please do speak out and ask for a moment so you can help calm and regulate your child. If you are uncertain or worried about something that is happening, the team will always be happy to stop what is being done in order to allay your fears. So don't be afraid to speak out and advocate as needed.

Try not to apologise to your child for what is happening to them in hospital. It's important to differentiate support and love from apology and guilt. If a child hears a parent/caregiver saying sorry, it is a cue to them that something bad is happening, which in turn increases stress and negative emotional response.

Where to Seek Help

Procedural anxiety can be managed, and symptoms improved. Speak with your child's CF care team about any concerns you may have and work together to create a plan around helping your child cope with procedures. There is a program at Perth Children's Hospital called [KKIND](#) (Keeping Kids in No Distress) which aims to help children cope with trauma, anxiety and distress caused by illness or hospitalisation. Ask about being referred to their services. A mental health professional at the hospital can also work with your child to help them learn some of the coping techniques mentioned above.

Our [occupational therapist](#) at CFWA can provide advice and support about what to do outside of the hospital to prepare your child for their hospital visits.

Useful Resources

- [Helping My Child Cope After Hospital: What Parents & Caregivers Can Do](#) (KKIND)
- [Developmental Stress & Comfort Cheat Sheet](#) (KKIND)
- [CFWA Factsheets](#)

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www.cfwa.org.au

Cystic Fibrosis WA
The Niche
11 Aberdare Road
Nedlands WA 6009

T: 08 6224 4100
E: info@cfwa.org.au

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