

Procedural Anxiety in Children

Procedural anxiety is an excessive fear or worry about a medical procedure. Between 40 and 60% of children report feelings of mild to intense anxiety before an invasive medical treatment. A level of worry or fear is common, however if it gets to the point where it is causing ongoing stress to the child, or interfering with the ability to carry out required medical treatment, further support may be required.

What Causes Procedural Anxiety?

Procedural anxiety is common among CF patients due to the frequency of hospital admissions and appointments that occur from a young age. It may also be triggered by anticipation of pain, previous bad experience, sense of losing control, fear of something going wrong or worry about the results, such as a lung function test or an admission.

Children can also pick up on their parent's emotions through body language and tone of voice, so it's important that parents/caregivers remain calm and supportive.

Symptoms

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

- Irritability
- Shaking/trembling
- Loss of appetite
- Crying
- Screaming



- Stopping talking completely
- Hitting, kicking, or biting a parent or the person trying to perform the procedure
- Running around the procedure room
- Trying to leave the procedure room
- Hiding behind or under furniture

Instead of trying to discipline a child, it's better to work through it by comforting them, and helping them develop coping skills to better manage it in the future. Your child's care team can help you find ways to comfort your child and build their coping skills.

Methods to Reduce Procedural Anxiety

- [Comfort positions/clinical holds](#)
- Talk to your child about the procedure beforehand, using age

appropriate information and language. This can help your child feel prepared and in control.

- Topical agents to numb the skin and minimise pain e.g. EMLA cream.
- Distraction techniques such as bubbles, music, singing favourite songs, playing with toys, iPhone with games or shows etc.
- Visualisation/imagery techniques.
- Deep breathing exercises.
- Progressive muscle relaxation, such as tensing and relaxing different groups of muscles.

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.

Useful Resources

- [Procedural Anxiety Members Stories](#) (CFWA)
- [Clinical Holding Factsheet](#) (PCH)
- [Helping My Child Cope After Hospital: What Parents & Caregivers Can Do](#) (KKIND)
- [Developmental Stress & Comfort Cheat Sheet](#) (KKIND)
- [At the Hospital: Helping My Child Cope](#) (KKIND)
- [At the Hospital: Helping My Teen Cope](#) (KKIND)
- [BRAVE program](#)

Last reviewed May 2023