Family Resource Assistance

Our Family Resource Liaisons are master’s level clinicians who are available to help individuals and families navigate the mental healthcare system by providing contact information for mental health resources in your community.

Family Resource Liaisons are available by phone at 720-777-4978, Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.

DEVELOPMENTAL AGE: DEALING WITH MEDICAL ISSUES IN CHILDREN BY AGES AND STAGES

A child’s development affects how he or she copes during medical visits, hospitalizations, and procedures. A child’s “developmental age” is different from a child’s age by birthday in that it deals with emotional, mental, and physical growth, which varies from one child to another. A group of children may all share the same age by birthday, but may be very different in terms of their developmental age or maturity.

DEVELOPMENTAL AGE GROUP: TEEN (12-18 YEARS)

SOCIAL
- Develops sense of self and identity
- Success leads to self-assurance and a strong identity

THINKING & LEARNING
- Can problem solve and reason
- Can recall a series of events
- Able to generalize concepts and think abstractly

Potential Concerns
- Dependence on adults
- Separation from friends; fear of not fitting in
- Fear of loss of identity
- Body image and sexuality concerns
- Fear of illness and death
- Feeling of being “invincible” or that nothing bad will happen leading to risky behavior

HOW TO HELP
- Encourage regular school attendance, time with friends
- Be aware of concerns about body image and seek professional help when needed
- Be open to discussing concerns related to illness. You may need to wait for teens to bring these concerns up themselves
- Be flexible about medical treatment wherever possible

EXAMPLES
- Don’t be afraid to ask your child’s doctors for options for medical equipment that may make your child less self-conscious.
- Some medical issues need to be addressed urgently, but others can wait. For example, talk to your child’s doctors about possibly delaying a medical appointment by a day so that your child can attend prom or other special events that are important to them
Helping Your Child Cope with Medical Procedures

The following highlights basic information about how to help your child deal with ongoing medical issues based on their developmental age. Always feel free to ask your healthcare providers for more specific information about your child.

DEVELOPMENTAL AGE GROUP: INFANT (0-1 YEAR)

SOCIAL
- Develops trust with reliable care and affection from caregivers

THINKING & LEARNING
- Learns by exploring

POTENTIAL CONCERNS
- Separation from caregivers
- Lack of stimulation or overstimulation
- Loss of a routine schedule
- Inconsistent responses to distress

HOW TO HELP
- Provide regular affection and care, especially during times of stress
- Maintain routines as much as possible

EXAMPLES
- Where possible, keep times for eating, sleeping, and play consistent, even when in the hospital

DEVELOPMENTAL AGE GROUP: TODDLER (1-3 YEARS)

SOCIAL
- Wants control and independence
- Success leads to confidence and ability to do things independently

THINKING & LEARNING
- Begins to use trial and error to get different results
- Very focused on self and the here and now — doesn’t understand time

POTENTIAL CONCERNS
- Separation from caregivers
- Limits on activities
- Changes in routines
- Unfamiliar people and environments

DEVELOPMENTAL AGE GROUP: PRESCHOOLER (3-6 YEARS)

SOCIAL
- Seeks power and control
- Success leads to a sense of purpose, mastery and increased independence

THINKING & LEARNING
- Focused on the present
- Thinks automatically, not logically
- Very focused on self
- Has difficulty taking the perspective of others.
- Has a big imagination and thinks creatively

POTENTIAL CONCERNS
- Separating from caregivers
- Fear of injury and pain
- Misunderstanding that illness or painful treatments might be punishment for doing something wrong

HOW TO HELP
- Offer basic information and reassurance about illness and treatment
- Provide consistent comfort
- Correct misperceptions
- Maintain routines
- Help your child understand how long a medical visit or procedure may last by comparing it to something your child knows.

EXAMPLES
- Tell a story to help explain what is going to happen and the possible feelings that your child may experience with simple words
- “As long as Sesame Street.” “As long as it takes to put on your shoes.” Use a visual timer or sand timer to show when the upsetting situation will be over. Singing songs or putting on shows can also serve as a great distraction

DEVELOPMENTAL AGE GROUP: ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE-SCHOOLER (6-12 YEARS)

SOCIAL
- Learns how to cope with new social and school demands
- Success leads to a sense of competence, strength and independence

THINKING & LEARNING
- Can make sensible judgments about things around them
- Has difficulty understanding abstract concepts (time)
- Is able to understand how many different things influence an event

POTENTIAL CONCERNS
- Fear of bodily injury and pain
- Fear of loss of control or skills and physical abilities
- Fear of illness, disability, and death

HOW TO HELP
- Offer basic information and reassurance about illness and treatment
- Correct misperceptions
- Encourage school attendance and time with friends
- Help children identify their strengths

EXAMPLES
- Use pictures or a written schedule to show expectations and routines for the day
- Make a book with cutout pictures, drawings, or writing about your child’s strengths. Have him or her help and add to it often