

Distraction Therapy

Information for families

Great Ormond Street Hospital
for Children NHS Trust

This leaflet explains about distraction therapy and how it is used at Great Ormond Street Hospital to help children cope with painful or difficult procedures.

What is distraction therapy?

Distraction therapy is a way of helping a child cope with a painful or difficult procedure. It aims to take the child's mind off the procedure by concentrating on something else that is happening. There are various methods of distraction therapy – some very simple to do, and others that need more practice.

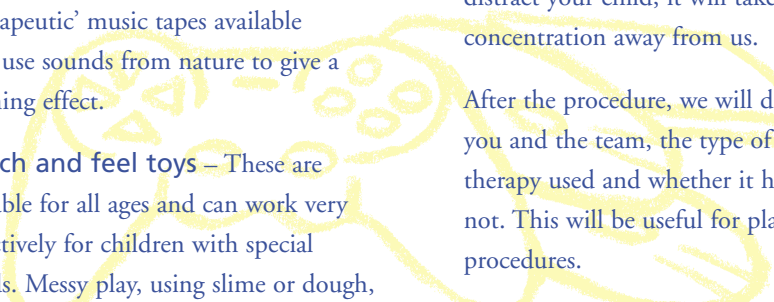
What does distraction involve?

At Great Ormond Street Hospital, qualified hospital play specialists usually carry out distraction therapy, although any member of staff who has had training from the play specialist can do it. Before the procedure starts, we will spend time with you and your child, to get to know your child better. We will explain the procedure, maybe using dolls, videos or books to explain further. It also allows us to find out if there is a particular aspect of the procedure worrying your child. Some children may be afraid of needles, whereas others are worried about anaesthetics. Once we know a little more about your child, we will be able to tailor the particular type of distraction therapy to your child.

Types of distraction therapy

There are many different methods of distraction therapy – some are more suitable for younger children, others work better for teenagers.

- **Controlled breathing** – This can be used for all ages and involves the child blowing a real or imaginary balloon or feather up in the air. Other things can also be used, like party blowers or blowpipes. Older children might want to just concentrate on their breathing.
- **Books** – There are lots of different books that can be used for distraction therapy – the type depends on your child's ages. For instance, a younger child may enjoy a pop-up book or a musical book, whereas an older child or teenager may prefer to listen to a story tape.
- **Games and puzzles** – These are suitable for all ages, but the game or puzzle will need to be appropriate for your child's age. Younger children may prefer jigsaws, whereas older children or teenagers may be happier with a hand-held computer game.

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- **Music** – Listening to or singing along with music can also be used successfully with all age groups. There are also ‘therapeutic’ music tapes available that use sounds from nature to give a calming effect.
 - **Touch and feel toys** – These are suitable for all ages and can work very effectively for children with special needs. Messy play, using slime or dough, can be used, as can textured toys like squashy plastic balls or cuddly toys. Toys that are attractive to look at, such as kaleidoscopes, mirrors or bubbles tubes can also work well.
 - **Make believe toys** – These can work very well with younger children who can use them to act out a story during the procedure. For instance, hand or finger puppets, dolls, soft toys or toy cars can all be used.
 - **Coaching** – Older children and teenagers may prefer to talk through the procedure as it happens, or otherwise just talk about things that interest them. By concentrating on carrying out the conversation, their mind might be distracted from the procedure itself.

During the procedure

Once your child has decided which type of distraction therapy to use, we will start. During the procedure it is very important we are the only one trying to distract your child. If other people are also trying to distract your child, it will take his or her concentration away from us.

After the procedure, we will discuss with you and the team, the type of distraction therapy used and whether it has worked or not. This will be useful for planning future procedures.

What happens if distraction therapy does not work?

Distraction therapy does not work for every child. If a particular type of distraction therapy does not work for your child, we can suggest alternative types. Some children cannot take their mind off the procedure, no matter what else is happening around them, in which case, a different method needs to be used. It can help to ask your child before the procedure to plan what they would like to do when it has finished. The child can then try to focus on that during the procedure, which may help take their mind off what is happening. If this method is used, it is very important your child is able to do what he or she planned, or this may make the situation worse for the next procedure.

If you have any questions, please talk to your play specialist or telephone the Activities Centre on 020 7829 8849.

How can I help?

You can help by supporting us during distraction. If you are worried about the procedure, for instance, if you are worried about needles, it can help you to focus on the distraction too. If you think you may be too upset to help, sometimes it is better that you are not in the room when the procedure is happening.

After the procedure, your child will need lots of praise. Even if he or she was still distressed, focus on one aspect that your child did well.

Can I use distraction therapy at home?

Yes, you can. Distraction therapy can be very useful if your child needs to have treatment at home or even before visits to the dentist or other stressful events. Talk to your play specialist and watch him or her during distraction. He or she will be able to suggest ways you can incorporate distraction therapy into future hospital visits.

Notes