

# Tips for Parents of Children with Chronic Pain

## The 4 S's

Here are some tips and treats that can help your child on their recovery journey. To learn more, have a look at some of the resources we have provided on the chronic pain information document.

### School

- > It is important to maintain school attendance even when pain is still present so that a child can have a regular routine and be distracted from focusing on symptoms. If your child has not been attending regularly then increasing engagement in school activities and setting goals is encouraged as part of the recovery process. It is useful to talk about the barriers that may influence these goals such as peer issues and learning gaps.
- > Encourage your child to plan some strategies or modified activities that allow them to participate as much as possible. Relaxation techniques (eg. breathing exercises, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation and mindfulness) are useful strategies that can be done in class or during breaks to reduce symptoms. Other coping strategies include talking to friends, going for a walk and stretching breaks.
- > Encourage a friendly and supportive relationship for your child with a staff member at the school (such as a school nurse/ counsellor/pastoral care teacher) so that your child has support during the school day.
- > Once a school plan is set up it helps for parents to step back and let your child take the responsibility for working towards their learning goals or investigating how to manage goals that have not been fulfilled.
- > Be aware that teachers may not have had experience with children with chronic pain. Passing on information and resources from your child's health professionals can assist school staff to help your child during school.



### Sleep

- > Talk to your child about sleep to understand what they are struggling with (eg. falling asleep or waking up frequently) Education about normal sleep cycles and what things can interrupt sleep can be helpful.
- > Encourage your child to develop healthy sleep habits (e.g. limiting screen time, using relaxation techniques, studying at a desk rather than in bed, are all really good tips for good sleep habits). It can sometimes be challenging for children to try to keep up good sleep habits but they are beneficial when done consistently.
- > Your child may learn some techniques from a health professional such as a psychologist who can assist with a plan of strategies to help your child with sleep. There are also apps for meditation and mindfulness targeted at improving good sleep which are very effective when used regularly. Check out some of the apps we have provided on our information document.
- > It is important for parents to get plenty of sleep too! Try to make sure that, as a parent, you are sleeping enough to feel rested. This will make you better able to help your child during the day.



## Social

- > Talking to your child about the potential challenges of maintaining friendships can help to validate their concerns and identify any fears and worries. By helping your child to think of creative ways that they can stay connected and have fun with their friends you can help them to feel engaged with their peers.
- > It can be helpful for your child to practice what to say to common questions from peers and how to explain their pain in a way that they find comfortable. Explaining why peers may ask questions can also help your child to manage social interactions.
- > By helping them to make a plan and consider coping strategies to deal with negative situations with peers it can assist them to find creative solutions before they escalate. Using a health professional such as a psychologist can provide you with good resources to guide you and your child with appropriate ways to handle difficult social relationships.
- > Remember that friends are important for your child though they may need help with setting boundaries to ensure that recovery goals, school work and sleep are a priority.



## Smart Movement

- > It really helps to explain to your child that by doing gentle, gradual movement this will not cause damage or injury. Bodies are incredibly strong and very good at healing. When we know this we find that any activity flares in pain just settle down very quickly and easily. This sends a key message that you can have pain and still have a normal life rather than missing out.
- > A physiotherapist who is skilled in working with children with persistent pain can help to determine a baseline level of function and then develop an achievable rate to increase activity. This may include targeted stretches or adding incidental movement into the daily routine (e.g. walking to the bus, walking the dog). Swimming or aqua therapy can be a good way to start to increase movement as being in water reduces the pressure on your body. It is so important to include fun activities that your child enjoys.
- > Children may avoid activities due to their fears about pain but it is important that they keep going forward in small steps to get their body moving again. Once children understand that this is important they can be more engaged and gradually better able to manage more tasks. This can often mean lots of encouragement to your child so that they can have an active role when planning and working towards their goal.



**One Final Point!** – Parenting a child in pain can sometimes be a tiring and exhausting process. We encourage all of our parents to think about who supports you! On a simple level it may mean scheduling some ‘mum’ or ‘dad’ time or talking to your GP to access support from someone like a psychologist who can assist with strategies to keep you feeling energised and confident in your parenting skills. By looking after yourself, you are helping your child to also do the same.



### For more information

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