Role of Child Life Specialist

To help support your child’s psychosocial and educational needs, the UMass Memorial Children's Medical Center has Certified Child Life Specialist. A Certified Child Life Specialist is a professional who is an expert in child development and supports coping and adjustment through therapeutic play, diagnostic education, age-appropriate preparation and expressive activities that enhance understanding and support mastery of challenging experiences.

A new diagnosis of diabetes can bring many emotions, such as anger, sadness and guilt. Whatever your feelings, they are normal and you are not alone. A Certified Child Life Specialist can help you and your child cope with and adjust to life with diabetes.

The Child Life Specialist on the Diabetes Team can help your child and family by:

- Prepare children for upcoming medical procedures and lab work.
- Help them cope with injections, blood checks, or taking other medications.
- Help children manage medical treatments and schedules.
- Help siblings to understand a brother/sister’s diabetes.
- Explaining diabetes in a way your child can understand
- Provide ideas on how to talk about diabetes with children’s friends and classmates.
- Engage children in meaningful play to reduce stress and help them feel more comfortable during visits.

How to help your child cope with medical procedures (i.e., blood work, finger sticks, IV’s, and insulin injections)

- Encourage your child to express his/her feelings about his/her healthcare experience. This can be done in a safe way by writing a story, engaging in pretend play or drawing a picture.
- Please reassure your child and let him/her know that it is all right to cry.
- Praise the child for what he/she is doing well. For example, if the child is holding still during an insulin injection, it is important to tell him/her what a wonderful job holding still he/she is doing.

Infants and Toddlers (newborn to two years old)

- One of the most effective ways to prepare a young child for a procedure is for the parent to be prepared for the experience. If the parent is calm and at ease, then the child senses this and responds in a similar way.
- Diversional items/activities during procedures are developmentally appropriate for infants and toddlers include: bubbles, cause and effect toys (such as pop-up toys), light up toys, play different sounds and/or songs, and peek-a-boo).
- The use of a soft, comforting voice, soft music, a gentle touch, and comfortably positioning your child your arms or lap during medical tests, when appropriate, can be very reassuring and supportive.
- Preparation for a procedure can include medical play by demonstrating the procedure on the child’s favorite stuffed animal or doll before the procedure is administered.
**Preschoolers (2-5 years old)**

- It is important to always be truthful to this age group as it is VERY important. This age group learns best by simple and concrete explanations of what is going to happen, so that they do not misinterpret or develop unrealistic fears of the procedure. Remember that at this age, they have a very active imagination and will make up their own explanations if not provided appropriate information.
- Diversional activities during procedures: blowing bubbles, pinwheel, singing a song, or sharing a special experience.
- Relaxation techniques: storytelling, talking about a favorite activity, listening to calming music, dimming the lights and comfortably positioning the child on your lab can help calm the child.
- At this age, it is important to reassure children that he/she did nothing to “cause” them to have diabetes, and the painful procedure or hospitalization is not a punishment for bad behavior.
- Give your child APPROPRIATE choices when possible, but be CLEAR she/he does NOT have a choice about getting their insulin injections, IV’s, blood draws, and blood sugar finger sticks. An appropriate choice would be: Which finger would you like to have your blood sugar finger stick done on?

**School Age (5-12 years old)**

- Diversional activities during procedures: I Spy books, Where’s Waldo?, pop-up books, glitter wands, music.
- Relaxation techniques: deep breathing, bubbles, blowing a pinwheel or listening to a favorite story.
- At this age, it is important to ask questions and express feelings about the hospital/diagnosis. Answer questions honestly, and help him/her work through their feelings.
- Validate their feelings; reassure him/her that it is okay to feel mad or frustrated.

**Adolescents (12 years and up)**

- Allow and encourage the teen’s participation in his/her health care and decisions.
- Peers and friends are important at this age. Make sure to encourage friend’s visits when appropriate.
- Relaxation techniques during procedures: deep breathing, music, imagining a favorite place
- Provide reason for procedure and describe exactly what is going to happen.
- Although adolescents are becoming more independent, they still need the support and supervision of their parents/guardians. Make sure you continue to support and encourage your adolescent. Remember to talk to them often, and offer help, encouragement and positive reinforcement.

If you would like the Outpatient Diabetes Clinic Child Life Specialist to help your child or your family, please call (774) 443-7183.

**Child Life Specialist Hours:**
Monday-Friday 8:00am-4:30pm