Boredom, loss of control, separation anxiety, regression, and fear of pain, are common reactions of children to illness and hospitalization. Population-specific diversional anxieties are effective in minimizing these reactions. Diversion, combined with adequate preparation, is also appropriate to gain children’s cooperation during procedures and treatments. Focusing children’s attention on something enjoyable is also an effective non-pharmacologic method of managing children’s pain. Diversional activities must be tailored to the child’s age, developmental level, interests, and condition, and should be provided in every setting where children are cared for.

This newsletter will highlight the developmental milestones of each age-group which directly relate to appropriate diversional activities. Population-specific toys and activities for diversional play will be reviewed for each developmental age. Implications for the healthcare provider will be examined.

**INFANCY**

During the first year, social and motor skills, fine and gross, gradually advance with growth and development and influence the selection of age-appropriate diversional activities.

**KEY MILESTONES IN INFANCY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Month</td>
<td>quiets when hears voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Months</td>
<td>visually searches to locate sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Months</td>
<td>follows objects, locates sounds by turning head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Months</td>
<td>shakes rattle when placed in hand</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Months</td>
<td>able to grasp objects voluntarily</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>manipulates small objects, smiles in mirror</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>plays peek-a-boo, frets when parents disappear (stranger anxiety)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>rings bell, reaches for toys out of reach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**10 months** plays pat-a-cake, follows pictures in a book

**12 months** imitates animal sounds, has favorite toy

**TODDLER**

The one to three year old is more mobile and active than the infant. The major milestone of walking has been achieved. The toddler is now perfecting gross motor skills, such as climbing, going up and down stairs, and running. Therefore, procedures which require the toddler to lie down or to be still for long periods can be particularly challenging. Exploration and imitation are distinguishing characteristics during this period. The ill toddler typically responds as strongly to painless, intrusive procedures, as much as to painful ones. Because of a poor sense of body integrity, anything that enters the child’s body, such as a rectal thermometer or otoscope, is stressful to this age group.

**KEY MILESTONES... THE TODDLER PERIOD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12-18 Months</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>imitates others, obeys simple commands, uses push / pull toys when walking, scribbles with a crayon, plays with a ball, turns the pages of a book (several at a time), learns the correct way to use common objects, such as play telephone, likes riding toys, says 10 words by 18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 -24 months</td>
<td>takes toys apart and puts them back together, points to pictures or objects when asked, including body parts, follows two-step requests – “Get your book and bring it here”, does simple puzzles, can draw a straight line, places geometric forms into appropriate holes, builds tower with cubes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DIVERSIONAL ACTIVITIES IN INFANCY**

- Involves parents in diverting and comforting infant
- Talk or sing in a soft voice for baby
- Play a music box, jack-in-the-box, musical mobiles placed 18” away
- Use rattles and bright toys that are small enough for infant to grasp
- Use squeaky animals and dolls, bells to get child’s attention
- Play peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake with baby
- Give older baby sticky tape to manipulate
### Key Characteristics – Preschoolers

- Likes to show-off, be the center of attention
- Plays simple board games, such as Candyland® or card games – “Go Fish”
- Plays “Simple Simon”
- Knows simple songs
- Names colors and coins
- Knows ABCs
- Counts
- Uses blunt scissors
- Completes analogies – “If fire is hot, then ice is what?”
- Knows composition of articles
- Likes to draw and color
- Talks constantly – likes to talk about themselves
- Questioning is at its peak – “Why…?”
- Has vivid imagination – “Let’s pretend your medication is Plankton, Spongebob’s enemy. Take it quickly and Spongebob will save the day and wash Plankton away.”

### Diversional Activities for Preschoolers

- Ask child to name colors of various items or to identify coins
- Have the child say the alphabet and count
- Sing simple songs with the child
- Have the child talk about themselves – “What are your favorite things to do?”; “Tell me a story.”
- Play a game using different analogies and asking composition of articles
- Play “Simon Says” with the child – “Simon says, raise your arms….”
- Tap into the child’s imagination – “Let’s practice holding still like a statue for your x-ray today.”
- Provide child with child-safety scissors, paper, crayons
- Ask child to help, such as by holding tape.
- Prepare child for procedures by letting them pretend to do the treatment on a stuffed toy.

### Diversional Activities for Toddlers

- Play a game – ask the child to point to different body parts, such as “Where’s your nose?”
- Read to child, letting him or her turn the pages, and have the child point to common objects in the book
- Encourage parent to be with child for comfort
- Toys – push-pull toys, play telephones, musical toys, books, thick crayons and paper, puzzles with large pieces, blocks

### Key Characteristics – School-Agers

- Competitive
- Likes collecting things
- Likes arts and crafts
- Likes playing games – board games, such as checkers, card games - Uno®, and video games
- Joins clubs or groups – Scouts, T-ball / baseball
- Hero worship of national sports or entertainment person is common
- Reads – classic books
- Likes to tell jokes and riddles
- Counts forwards and backwards
- Knows days of week and months
- Can spell words, do simple math
- Likes to draw
- Writes brief stories

### Diversional Activities for School-Agers

- Provide games that can be played alone or with another child or adult
- Challenge the child to compete with him / herself – “Can you hold still for 10 seconds?”
- Have child count forward, then backwards, during a procedure
- Talk to child about his or her “hero”
- Ask child if he or she wants to wash out medicine cups and collect / decorate them
- Ask child to tell jokes or riddles
- Encourage communication with friends – writing letters to classmates
- Toys – puzzles, books, models, stringing beads, paint sets
- Allow child to help plan his / her day

### The Schoolage Child

The 3 to 6 years old is energetic, curious, and is able to speak more clearly. Speech is usually 100% intelligible by 4 years of age. A preschooler has a short attention span and typically asks many questions. Preschool children also have vivid imaginations and commonly have many fears, real and imagined. Imaginary playmates are typical during this age group.

**Diversional Activities for Toddlers**

- Play a game – ask the child to point to different body parts, such as “Where’s your nose?”
- Read to child, letting him or her turn the pages, and have the child point to common objects in the book
- Encourage parent to be with child for comfort
- Toys – push-pull toys, play telephones, musical toys, books, thick crayons and paper, puzzles with large pieces, blocks

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**Diversional Activities for Preschoolers**

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- Have the child say the alphabet and count
- Sing simple songs with the child
- Have the child talk about themselves – “What are your favorite things to do?”; “Tell me a story.”
- Play a game using different analogies and asking composition of articles
- Play “Simon Says” with the child – “Simon says, raise your arms….”
- Tap into the child’s imagination – “Let’s practice holding still like a statue for your x-ray today.”
- Provide child with child-safety scissors, paper, crayons
- Ask child to help, such as by holding tape.
- Prepare child for procedures by letting them pretend to do the treatment on a stuffed toy.

**The Schoolage Child,** from 6-12 years of age, is eager to engage in tasks that can be carried through to completion. A love of learning is characteristic during this period. Competition and recognition influence the child’s achievements. The need for friendships becomes more apparent. School-agers enjoy the feeling of belonging. Joining formal and informal clubs or teams typically occurs. Boredom is a common problem for the ill and/or hospitalized child.

**Key Characteristics – School-Agers**

- Competitive
- Likes collecting things
- Likes arts and crafts
- Likes playing games – board games, such as checkers, card games - Uno®, and video games
- Joins clubs or groups – Scouts, T-ball / baseball
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- Writes brief stories

**Diversional Activities for School-Agers**

- Provide games that can be played alone or with another child or adult
- Challenge the child to compete with him / herself – “Can you hold still for 10 seconds?”
- Have child count forward, then backwards, during a procedure
- Talk to child about his or her “hero”
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- Allow child to help plan his / her day

*Assess each child’s favorite toys and activities, particularly quiet ones. Encourage the child’s family to bring favorite toys from home, to provide security and familiarity. If available, a child life specialist is an excellent resource for helping carry out appropriate population-specific diversional activities to meet the child’s needs.*
1. A vital part of caring for ill children of all ages is assessment of their favorite activities and toys, as well as their developmental level.
   a. True
   b. False

2. Brook, age 10 months, is being examined by her surgeon. Her growth and development are normal. An appropriate diversional activity is to:
   a. Place a rattle in her hand.
   b. Play pat-a-cake with her.
   c. Give her blocks to build a tower.
   d. Let her turn pages in a book.

3. Kelsey, 18 months old, is scheduled to have an IV discontinued in her right hand before discharge. Which of the following interventions is appropriate?
   a. Let Kelsey hold the bandaid®, while sitting on her mother’s lap during the procedure.
   b. Have Kelsey lie down and help her count to 10
   c. Explain the importance of lying still to her, while naming different colors.
   d. Have another healthcare provider restrain her and proceed as quickly as possible.

4. Which of the following activities is an age-appropriate diversional activity for Kelsey?
   a. Sharing jokes and riddles with her
   b. Using blunt scissors to cut out pictures
   c. Saying the alphabet with her
   d. Asking her to point to different body parts

5. Parents should be encouraged to treat their child who is ill to all new toys, rather than bringing the child’s favorites from home.
   a. True
   b. False
6. To prepare a child for an x-ray, saying, “Pretend you’re a robot and hold real still” is appropriate for which age-group?

   a. Infant
   b. Toddler
   c. Preschooler
   d. School-ager

7. A 10 year old is on strict bedrest and says, “There’s nothing to do.” Which of the following activities is age-appropriate?

   a. Playing a game of completing analogies
   b. Arranging for him to play a game with an age-mate
   c. Asking his parents to bring in his homework at the end of the week.
   d. Encouraging him to rest and watch television.

8. Which characteristic does NOT describe school-agers?

   a. Competitors
   b. Collectors
   c. Jokesters
   d. Imitators

9. The grandmother of a 9 year old asks what toy would be appropriate for her granddaughter’s birthday next week?

   a. paint-by-number set
   b. simple board game, such as Candyland®
   c. set of wooden blocks
   d. baby doll

10. Which toy would be most appropriate for a 4 year old? A/an:

    a. chess set.
    b. play nurse / doctor kit.
    c. rattle.
    d. airplane model kit.