



**Evelina**  
London

# Therapeutic and specialised play service

**A guide to therapeutic distraction**



showing  
we **Care**

## What is therapeutic distraction?

A method of play which provides the child or young person with something positive to focus on, most commonly used during invasive medical procedures. This enables the child to have a more positive experience and sense of control.

## Why is it useful?

Adherence from a patient is imperative to successfully complete a procedure.

With developmentally appropriate support and distraction, children can feel in control and have an alternative focus.

## Things to remember

Every child is different - some things which work for one child will not work for another, using the child's interests helps.

It doesn't always work, but support is always appreciated. Even if it doesn't go exactly to plan, try to focus on something positive, like keeping the arm still or engaging in 'Where's Wally'!

Praise and prizes - gives the child a tangible reinforcer and lets them know that we are proud of them!

Crying is okay!

## Our top ten distraction tools

- 1 Noisy toys
- 2 Pop up toys
- 3 Noisy books
- 4 Light up toys
- 5 Search and find books
- 6 Cuddle from parent/carer
- 7 Puppets
- 8 Wind-up toys
- 9 Singing
- 10 Bubbles

## **D = Diversion**

Allowing the child to focus on a positive alternative

## **I = Information**

Should be truthful and honest while developmentally appropriate

## **S = Support**

For the child, family and hospital team

## **T = Trust**

Play specialists building a trusting rapport

## **R = Reassurance**

In an unfamiliar and clinical environment

## **A = Alleviate anxiety**

Therefore creating a more positive experience

## **C = Coping**

Enabling individualised coping techniques

## **T = Time**

Calling the play specialist early to allow time to build rapport

## **I = Involvement**

Giving the child control and choice

## **O = One voice**

Too many people talking at once cause confusion

## **N = Nurturing**

Allowing the parent or carer to offer comfort and support

## **Before the procedure**

Whenever possible, call the play specialist before the procedure starts. This gives them the opportunity for preparation, to build rapport with the child and family, and discuss distraction. Getting the room and equipment ready before the child enters can minimise anxiety.

## **During the procedure**

Think about comfort positioning, also called therapeutic holding. This allows the child to feel safe, and reduces number of staff needed. For more information, ask your play specialist.

Decide on which voice will be speaking. When children are in stressful situations, processing information can be extra difficult, especially when coming from multiple directions.

Create an opportunity for choices, like choosing whose lap to sit on or picking which toy to play with. This can help give them a sense of control.

## **After the procedure**

Praise the child for what they did well. Only reinforce good behaviour, and be specific. For example: “you did really well at keeping your hand still which made the doctor’s job easier”.

Allow opportunity for the child to talk or play through what happened. Post procedural play gives an opportunity for debrief and a more positive experience next time.

## Useful sources of information

### **National Association of Hospital Play Staff**

w: [www.nahps.org](http://www.nahps.org)

For information on the importance of play in hospital and role of the play specialist.

### **Hospital Play Staff Education Trust**

w: [www.hpset.org.uk](http://www.hpset.org.uk)

The registered body for Hospital Play Staff.

### **Action for Sick Children**

w: [www.actionforsickchildren.org](http://www.actionforsickchildren.org)

A children's healthcare charity, specially formed to ensure sick children always receive the highest standard of care possible.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit

[www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets)

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about therapeutic play, please call the hospital switchboard,

**t:** 020 7188 7188 and ask for the bleep desk. Ask them to bleep a play specialist and wait for a response. This will connect you to one of our team.

**e:** [PlaySpecialists@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:PlaySpecialists@gstt.nhs.uk)

**w:** [www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/our-services/hospital/playspecialists](http://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/our-services/hospital/playspecialists)

My play specialist bleep is.....

## **Evelina London Medicines Helpline**

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am-5pm

**e:** [letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk)

## **Your comments and concerns**

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).

**t:** 020 7188 8801

**e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)

**e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

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A list of sources is available on request



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