

## CHAPTER 12

# HOW PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR CHILD

*Good parents give their children Roots and Wings. Roots to know where home is, wings to fly away and exercise what's been taught them.*

—JONAS SALK, PHYSICIAN, DISCOVERED EPONYMOUS VACCINE FOR POLIO

### **IS YOUR CHILD GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP?**

#### **HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD GET A BETTER NIGHT'S SLEEP**

- How to Help Your Child Get a Better Night's Sleep
- Dr. Harvey Karp's "Pearls"
- Implementing your sleep plan-- improving sleep hygiene

### **RELAXATION TECHNIQUES**

- Relaxation Breathing Exercise for Parents
- Muscle Relaxation Techniques
- Muscle Relaxation/Muscle Contraction Exercise

### **FAVORITE PLACE**

### **MINDFULNESS MEDITATION**

### **PAIN PREVENTION: STRESSES AND WARNING SIGNS**

In this chapter we are going to give you guidance on how to help your child when their pain flares, gets worse, and your child is having difficulty coping, even what to do in pain emergencies. We will provide step-by-step guidance on several useful pain and stress reducing techniques, such as breathing, muscle relaxation and mindfulness. You will also learn strategies for helping your child get a good night's sleep, lack of which is one of the major contributors that makes pain worse.

Remember, **the goal for the treatment of children with chronic pain is not “to get rid of the pain first,”** but rather to *“help him function and then the pain will fade.”*

While doctors use medicines and other therapies to calm the nervous system and alter pain circuits in the brain, it's up to you to help your child carry out the tasks of daily living, including getting a good night's sleep, eating well, going to school, doing schoolwork, socializing, exercising, and participating in family activities, including home chores. Most parents want to help their child to function but don't know what to do. This chapter will give you the tools to help your child.

**Remember, you are a role model for your child.** The more you take care of yourself, the more likely that your child will also begin to practice self-soothing.

## IS YOUR CHILD GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP?

One of the frequently missed assessments for children in pain is attention to sleep... and getting enough of it. Being sleep-deprived is a set-up for a bad day, for parent and child.

To answer the question, take note of the answers to the 8 questions below in Table 12.1. If you answer yes to several of these questions, the chances are your child isn't getting enough quality sleep, especially if she has a chronic pain problem.

**Table 12.1** Getting enough Sleep?

<b>1</b>	Does your child have trouble falling asleep? What time does she go to bed?
<b>2</b>	Does she have problems <i>staying</i> asleep, once she falls asleep?
<b>3</b>	If she wakes up during the night, does she waken several times, and then have difficulty falling back to sleep?
<b>4</b>	Does she have difficulty getting up in the morning?
<b>5</b>	Is she fatigued during the day?
<b>6</b>	Is she on her iPhone™ texting or watching TV in her room before bedtime?
<b>7</b>	Does she nap during the day?
<b>8</b>	Does she take medication for sleep and is not sleeping? Does this medication help with sleep but make her feel groggy the next day?

### How to Help Your Child Get a Better Night's Sleep

Sleep is a cornerstone of pain relief. Not getting enough restorative (refreshing, healing, deep) sleep is devastating to a child's body. Children typically need more sleep than do adults. Children with chronic pain who are not getting sufficient restorative sleep have more difficulty learning how to cope because their brain does not learn as well when it is sleep deprived. This is especially true for adolescents whose sleep cycle is often at odds with the requirements of the school system. The lack of restorative sleep at night creates a vicious cycle: chronic pain can cause insufficient sleep, and insufficient sleep maintains the pain.

First step in helping your child sleep is to develop a plan together with her to insure a good night's sleep. For example, if Jamie has trouble sleeping at night, the answer isn't, "What one thing can I do to get her to sleep?" or, as we often hear, "Can you just give her something to make her fall asleep!" If Jamie is not falling asleep, let's review the possible reasons why not. (Table 12.2) Once you know the reasons, it is much easier to come up with a treatment plan. Take note of the following:

**Table 12.2 Reasons for sleeping difficulties**

1	What time is she eating dinner? (If she is eating a heavy meal right before going to sleep, the food may be interfering with her sleep.)
2	Is she consuming caffeine products—such as soda, chocolate, or tea—before bed?
3	What does she do after dinner and at night to get ready for bed? Watch TV or work on computer or play videogames? (The more active she is, especially on the computer or with videogames, the more aroused her nervous system will become, the harder it will be for her to fall asleep.)
4	Do they watch TV, play computer games, etc. while in bed? (The bed should be the place where they can read or listen to soft music and get ready to go to sleep.)
5	Does she have a bedtime routine? (Developing routines is helpful, especially for the child who has sleep difficulty.)
6	If she is < 13 years old, do you spend any time with her at bedtime in her room so that bedtime is associated with pleasant parent-related activities? (e.g. telling a story; massaging her head, neck, and shoulders; talking about things that happened during the day.)
7	Is it hard to leave her room? Is bedtime dragged out 1+ hr.?
8	Is she sleeping in her bed or your bed? (Goal = to sleep in her own bed.)
9	Does she have a need for a nightlight? (if so, then a small nightlight can help her avoid larger lights that might interfere with sleep.)

### Dr. Harvey Karp's "Pearls"

We asked Dr. Harvey Karp<sup>46</sup>, one of the world's foremost Pediatric experts on sleep in infants and young children, to offer some "pearls of wisdom."

*Sleep is a wonderful puzzle! We spend a third of our lives in it, yet it seems as foreign as the depths of the ocean. Over the past thirty years, however, we've uncovered fascinating new clues to help us better understand this misty frontier. For example:*

*Sleep struggles are among the most common challenges new parents face. (Exhaustion is such a stressful experience that the elite Navy SEALs are put through sleep deprivation to train them to endure torture!) And this is not an isolated problem for the parents of babies. One third of toddlers fight bedtime and half still get up once a night (one in ten wakes twice... or more!).*

**WHAT IS SLEEP?** *Sleep is very different from being unconscious. In sleep, you are still responsive to the environment. You can respond to the phone ring. Though we sleep right on the edge of your bed, we rarely roll off. During sleep, the body is more or less at rest (sleep walking and night terrors are exceptions), but our brain wave activity is as perky as when we're fully awake! We organize and store memories; enter drowsy wakefulness periodically to scan the room for danger (like smoke or someone opening a window); and, of course we experience the surreal thrill of dreaming.*

*You can be awake and asleep... at the same time! When you're exhausted some brain cells fall asleep, even though you are still awake. Over the past fifty years, though we better understand the sleep experience, we are getting less of it. The average adult nighttime sleep has dropped from eight to about seven hours. For weary moms and dads, a good night's sleep shimmers in their minds like a desert mirage.*

*A 2004 National Sleep Foundation poll found that 20% of parents of infants and 12% of parents of tots and preschoolers get less than six hours of sleep a night. Like a rock thrown in a lake, exhaustion triggers waves after wave of quarreling, accidents, overeating, illness, worry and depression. Over just a few weeks, that level of sleep deprivation impairs the brain as much as being drunk, leading to car accidents and bed-sharing tragedies!*

**Debunking myths offers help for parents of babies/young children.** *"Be quiet! The baby is sleeping!" We used to think babies needed total silence and preferred sleeping in a flat still bed. However, we now know that the womb surrounds fetuses with a symphony of sensation. And, imitating these sensations, for example, using swaddling (for at least the first four months) can reduce night waking and reduce the temptation*

46 Harvey Karp, MD, FAAP, Author, *The Happiest Baby Guide To Great Sleep: Birth – Five Years* [www.happiestbaby.com/about-dr-karp](http://www.happiestbaby.com/about-dr-karp)

*parents have to place babies in the riskier stomach position. In addition, white noise (similar to the deep, loud rumble babies hear 24/7 in the womb) may help enhance sleep.*

*Studies have shown that establishing better sleep patterns early in infancy leads to fewer nighttime struggles during the toddler years. And, longer sleep has also been associated with a reduced risk of a variety of health concerns (including overweight at one year of age and symptoms of attention deficit/hyperactivity).*

***Establishing good routines promote improved sleep.*** Those include daytime practices (outdoor play; sun exposure; avoidance of caffeinated beverages, dark chocolate, stimulant medications) and nighttime practices (***reduced brightness of artificial lights***; reduced screen time – ***the bluish light of computer screens reduces release of the brain’s natural sleep hormone, melatonin***; ***avoiding stimulating play before bedtime***; ventilated rooms that are neither too hot or cold; establishing a caring, predictable bedtime routine – such as massage, reading, lullabies, rumbly, low-pitched white noise).

*Of course, even if you have established a successful sleep routine, it’s highly likely that your child will have periodic struggles. Resistance going to bed; difficulty falling asleep; and night waking can be provoked by a variety of common life events (such as trips - especially those that require time zone changes; discomfort of teething or illness; new home/school/sibling; traumatic events – witnessed/experienced or seen in media).*

***Notes for better sleep: White noise isn’t just for your baby.*** The brain has a hard time paying attention to two things at once, so a strong, rumbly white noise can cover over disturbing sounds from the next-door neighbors or passing trucks...or your own inner voice of worries and concerns. (Start it softly, an hour before sleep to give your brain a few days to get used to it.)

***Light is the enemy of sleep.*** For thousands of years, darkness was the brain’s cue to get ready to sleep. (Electric lights have only been around for a hundred years.) Your house lights (and especially the bluish light from your computer screen, phone or TV) trick your brain into thinking it’s still afternoon. The brain then shuts off your natural melatonin, which delays your drowsiness until much later at night.

## Implementing your sleep plan – improving sleep hygiene

Once you’ve asked and answered these questions in Table 12.2 and read Dr. Karp’s “Pearls” above, you can start developing a strategy to help your child sleep better. This type of thinking also will help your child to cope better. The following nine points are good guides for better sleep.

- 1 Set a schedule. Your child should go to bed at a set time each night and get up at the same time each morning. Many adolescents are sleep-deprived during the week with homework, late nights, and early mornings for school. Weekends are their “catch-up” time. However, for some children, weekend sleep patterns may make it more difficult to wake up early on Monday mornings. See what works best for your child.
- 2 Exercise. Your child should exercise 20 to 30 minutes a day. Daily exercise will help her sleep, but it is best to exercise about 5 to 6 hours before going to bed since exercising too close to bedtime can interfere with sleep.
- 3 Avoid caffeine products. Your child should avoid (soft) drinks as most sodas do contain caffeine; it is a stimulant and will keep her awake.
- 4 If your child is napping during the day, interrupt this pattern so that she will be more tired at night.
- 5 Don’t lie in bed awake. If your child can’t get to sleep, he shouldn’t just lie in bed. Let him do something else, such as reading or listening to soft music, until he feels tired. The worry about “trying to fall asleep” will keep him awake.
- 6 Sleep until sunlight. If possible, wake up with the sun, or use very bright lights in the morning. Sunlight helps the body’s internal biological clock reset itself each day. It is often helpful for a child to get at least an hour of morning sunlight if he has problems falling asleep at night.
- 7 Control the room temperature. Maintain a comfortable temperature in the bedroom. Room temperatures that are too hot or too cold can prevent your child from falling asleep or can wake her up during the night.
- 8 For younger children, setting up a bedtime routine with a parent is very helpful. For example, the last thing that your child might do before sleep is for you to read him a story while he is in his bed, or massage his head and back..
- 9 If the above steps do not help your child get restful sleep (or even if they do), teach her any of the relaxation techniques for use in bed: progressive relaxation, breathing exercises (see below).

## RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Relaxation techniques are ones that you and your child can use throughout your life, even when there is no pain. Susmita Kashikar-Zuck, Ph.D<sup>47</sup> offers this metaphor:

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47 Susmita Kashikar-Zuck, Ph.D., Professor of Pediatrics and Clinical Anesthesiology Research Director, Behavioral Medicine and Clinical Psychology, Division of Pain Management. Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center [www.cincinnatichildrens.org/bio/k/susmita-kashikar-zuck](http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/bio/k/susmita-kashikar-zuck)

*“Practicing your relaxation and biofeedback skills is like a fire drill. Fires don’t happen very often, but you don’t want to wait until one happens to practice how to save yourself. Pain can come and go, but the time the pain is bothering you is not a good time to learn anything. You need to practice all the time, so when the pain comes, you will be ready. So have fun, learn well, and enjoy!”*

### Breathing Exercises, Especially for Panic

Depending upon how it is done, breathing may reduce pain or accentuate pain. Improper breathing techniques can greatly increase the pain. Some children hyperventilate when they become anxious or during a pain episode. This means that their breathing pattern changes to shallow, rapid breathing. When this happens, your child breathes out too much of the “exhale gas” called carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) too quickly. Getting carbon dioxide out of your body too quickly causes your body to lose acid. These chemical changes might cause your child to feel dizzy, feel like he can’t catch his breath, or is choking and his fingers or lips may begin to tingle or even become numb.

The following breathing exercise should help your child feel more in control, allow him/ her to get rid of the “funny feelings,” and feel more relaxed.

*Have your child breathe into a paper bag for about thirty seconds with very slow, long exhalations.*

*If your child is anxious and has difficulty concentrating, suggest that he imagine a balloon that needs to be blown up.*

*Ask him to purse his lips to blow up the balloon and to slowly start blowing so that he can make the balloon bigger and bigger.*

*Suggest that as he blows up the balloon, he notice its size, color, and shape, and whether there is any writing or pictures on the balloon.*

After a few moments, let your child rest until he feels more relaxed and his breathing pattern has returned to normal. The exercise above is a good one to use during an acute pain or panic attack when there isn’t much time to get your child’s breathing under control.

### Relaxation Breathing Exercise for Parents

The breathing exercise below requires a little more planning and time, but is excellent for helping your child to develop patterns of self-soothing and feelings of control over the pain. This is an excellent pain preventive strategy to teach your

child. But now, we want you to practice this first alone for yourself to experience what happens in your body as you develop these breathing skills. This is part of your learning to take care of yourself so that you can continue in your role as the major support for your child.

You can practice this technique with your child later, prompting him or her to take the next step, until she can do it on her own. Younger children may benefit from a time each day when you and your child do this technique together; older children and adolescents can learn this technique for themselves. A daily practice of 10 minutes a day will be a useful prevention strategy.

*Preparation Directions:*

*Find a quiet room where you can get into a comfortable position to relax. The room should be fairly warm. When you become deeply relaxed, your body temperature drops and you can feel cold.*

*Close the door and tell other family members that you will need to be left alone for the next half hour (or as long as you would like). Put up a “do not disturb” sign, if you think that will help.*

*To use this technique to relax but not sleep, do this exercise sitting up, either sitting on the floor while leaning against a wall to support your back or sitting in a straight-backed chair. Your arms can drop comfortably in your lap.*

*If the intent is to use this technique to go to sleep, do this exercise lying in bed ready for sleep.*

*Eyes are closed. Arms and legs should not be crossed. This might cut off circulation and cause numbness and tingling.*

After you first go through the exercise below, you can then guide your child with the following directions:

*Breathe in deeply and exhale slowly as though you were whistling. Breathe deeply and exhale slowly three times.*

*Count in your mind as you breathe out and see if you can get to a higher number each time that you breathe out (allowing yourself to breathe just a bit more slowly each time you breathe out).*

*Notice your body beginning to feel more relaxed with each breath out.*

*After three nice long breaths, you should begin to notice that tension in your body is moving through your body and out through your breath as you exhale.*



*Notice your body becoming heavy and limp, as if it were too much effort to even think about moving it. Conversely, you may notice your body feeling weightless, or comfortably warm, as if you were floating in warm water.*

*You might notice that your breathing is nice and slow. At the end of your breath in, pause for a moment. Then, let the breath out again, nice and slowly. Continue breathing in this way for a few minutes.*

*Notice your breath pushing down gently on your diaphragm. As this happens, you might notice your stomach begin to rise with each breath in. This is called “diaphragmatic breathing” and is the type of breathing that allows the most air into the lungs, with the least effort. (You can imagine your belly is an accordion, moving up and down as you breathe.) You can put one hand on your belly and feel it rise as you breathe in. The other hand can be placed on your chest and shouldn’t move very much. When you breathe out, press the small of your back against the wall of floor depending upon whether you are sitting or lying down.*

*To end the breathing exercise, you should first go back to breathing normally and effortlessly. Then focus on taking three purposeful long breaths by extending the exhalation nice and slowly.*

*If you are in bed lying down and are using this technique to fall asleep, you may have fallen asleep somewhere in the middle of this exercise. If you have, this is fine. If you do this every night, your brain will learn to make the connections that indicate that it is time to fall asleep.*

As you practice this breathing exercise, your brain will learn how to change to diaphragmatic breathing and your diaphragm muscles will get stronger and stronger. This will bring more air into the lungs and you will begin to feel more and more refreshed at the end of the day, rather than fatigued.

With this personal experience under your belt, you can then help your child to notice his breathing... that it can be as simple as asking him to pay attention to the beginning and end of his breathing out (exhaling) and breathing in (inhaling). He can be reminded to just notice his breathing but not try to change it. He can notice his belly moving up and down as he breathes.

For younger children, ask them to place a stuffed animal on their belly to help them notice the up and down movement of their belly as they breathe. You can ask them to breathe in and out slowly and notice how they feel, and then breathe in and out more quickly and see how that feels, and then go back to normal breathing where they just notice their breath but not try to change it, just notice it and their stuffed animal moving up and down on their belly as they breathe.

Breathing is the easiest thing to do and pay attention to during times of stress. Next time you feel stressed, stop and take three long slow breaths and see what happens in your body when you do that.

## MUSCLE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Chronic pain can cause children to tense their muscles and even hold their body in abnormal ways to protect themselves from stretching or injuring the painful body part.

However, pain in one body area can create pain in another area because of muscle tension. This set of muscle relaxation exercises is meant to encourage muscles that are already tense to relax, prevent the build-up of stress in the muscles, and prevent muscle-related pain from developing.

So now, begin this exercise yourself first. It will help you to personally experience the feelings in your body as you carry out this muscle relaxation program before you guide your child in this exercise.

### Muscle Exercise #1: Progressive Relaxation

Allow yourself to be in a quiet place. If you are doing this exercise to help you sleep, it is best to do this in your bed just before you are ready to go to sleep. For relaxation but not sleep, it is best to do this in a comfortable chair upright or in a recliner chair.

*Take three slow deep breaths and then just continue to breathe normally. Notice your breathing.*

*You will begin to feel tension in your body flowing through your body and out through your breath. Notice energy from the air coming into your body through your lungs when you breathe in and feel it flow to the parts of your body where you need the most energy.*

*As you continue to breathe normally, focus your attention on your big toe on your right foot. With each breath out, notice that toe relaxing and feel its warmth as the circulation increases and more warm blood begins to flow through it.*

*Notice the relaxation beginning to spread to the big toe on your left foot and notice that toe begin to feel relaxed and warm.*

*Notice the relaxation spreading in turn to each of the next toes on both feet... first the toe next to the big toes and the next toe and so on until all of the toes on both feet feel relaxed, warm, and comfortable.*

*Notice the relaxation beginning to spread up to the top of your feet and under to the soles of your feet... spreading upward to your ankles, your calves, and shins, and up and around to your entire thighs... your feet might begin to feel so heavy that they can't even think about moving... they can just stay there and relax.*

*Now notice, with each breath out, this wave of relaxation continues to move up your body... to your buttocks... lower back and around to your pelvis... you might notice your body feel as if it is sinking deeper into your bed or chair. Allow the feeling to flow in that direction... but whatever you feel is fine... just notice it.*

*As the wave of relaxation continues to move up your back and around to your belly, notice how your abdomen and back muscles feel when they begin to relax... this is a different feeling... warm... relaxation spreading up your body to your upper back and chest... to your shoulders and the area between your shoulder blades... around to your neck... front... sides... back of your neck.*

*Feel the relaxation spreading up into your head... the back of your head... sides... top... forehead... eyebrows... eyes (if they haven't closed by now, they may just want to close because the lids might feel too relaxed to be able to work to keep your eyes open... but whatever happens is fine).*

*Notice the relaxation spreading down your face to your cheeks... your nose... the area above your lip... your lips.... your chin... around to your ears.*

*Now take a moment to enjoy the feeling of deep relaxation... feel yourself becoming deeper and deeper relaxed with each breath out... allow your body to become as deeply relaxed as you would like to be and spend a few moments noticing how good it feels to be relaxed.*

As you notice this feeling of relaxation, your brain will record it. This will become a new memory that can be called upon when you need it. Each time you practice this relaxation exercise, that memory will become stronger and stronger. In time, you will just need to take three deep breaths and your brain will know exactly what to do...you will find yourself automatically going into a deep state of relaxation. You might find this happening even when you are busy doing other things. That is, you no longer will need to go through this exercise.

## **Muscle Exercise #2: Relaxation/Muscle Contraction**

Some people have a difficult time knowing what it feels like to have a muscle “relax,” especially people who have been in pain for a while. Chronically tense muscles use up energy when they are contracted. When you learn how to relax muscles, you free up energy so that you feel less tired and have the strength to

get better. The exercise below will help you to feel the difference between muscle tension and muscle relaxation. It may be practiced on its own or in preparation for the progressive relaxation exercise that we described above.

*To begin, lie in your bed or sit in a comfortable chair, as above, depending upon whether you are using this technique to help you (or your child) sleep or to relax and become energized.*

*Begin by taking three deep breaths as in the previous exercise, breathing out very slowly so that any tension in your body flows out through your breath and oxygen flows into your body with each breath in.*

*Contract your toes first by bending them down and squeezing as hard as you can and then just let them relax for a moment while you take two slow breaths.*

*Next, contract your ankles by bending your feet forward firmly for as long as you can and then bending them back upward firmly towards your shins for as long as you can. Then allow your feet to relax while you take two very slow deep breaths. Also take a moment to notice how relaxed your feet feel when they no longer have to do anything... just relax.*

*Contract the muscles of your entire legs. If you are sitting, stretch your legs out straight in front of you and hold them as long and straight as you can until it takes too much effort to keep them there; and then you can let them go and just allow them to feel heavy and relaxed.*

*If you are in bed, bend your knees and bring your knees to your chest if you can, or bend them as much as you can and hold that position for as long as you can until it takes too much effort to continue. And then allow them to drop and become straight again, heavy and relaxed. Again, when you are finished, take two very slow deep breaths and just notice how relaxed your whole body is beginning to feel.*

*Next, if you are sitting in a chair, bend your upper body down toward your lap or below your knees if you are able to and hold that position and keep pushing your upper body down... down... until it takes too much effort to keep it there... then come back up and allow your whole body to sink deeply into the chair and relax... again take two very slow deep breaths and allow your body to just “be” without having to do anything during this time.*

If you are in bed doing this exercise, take three deep breaths and fill your lungs as your belly expands and just hold each breath for as long as you can before you slowly let out each breath. Notice your chest and belly muscles beginning to relax

as you breathe out each time. Again, take two very slow deep breaths and allow your body to just “be” without having to do anything during this time.

*Now expand your chest forward while you bring your shoulders back as close together as you can get them, making as deep a fold between your shoulder blades as you can... also bring shoulders downward... they should not be up by your ears... hold this position for as long as you can until it takes too much effort and then release the pose. Again, take two very slow deep breaths and allow your body to relax without having to do anything during this time.*

*Bend your arms by bringing your hands up to your shoulders with your palms facing your shoulders and squeeze your arms in that position for as long as you can until it takes too much effort and then drop your arms at your sides and allow them to relax while you take two slow deep breaths.*

*Now stretch your arms up as high as you can (if you are in bed you can stretch them upward toward the ceiling) and keep your hands fully open, palms facing each other, and your fingers outstretched wide apart. Keep your arms and hands that way until it takes too much effort and then drop them at your side and allow them to relax while you take two slow deep breaths.*

*Finally, bend your head forward to touch your chin to your chest as far as you can go and hold it for as long as you can until it takes too much effort and then bring your head back up to a normal position. Do the same to the right and to the left, by turning your head to one side as long and deeply as you can and then to the other side as long and deeply as you can and then allow your head and neck to relax while you take two slow deep breaths.*

*Take just a few moments to be still and notice your breath as it returns to normal breathing again and notice how deeply relaxed, warm, and comfortable your body feels without having to do anything and just relax for a few moments while you breathe.*

As you do this exercise with your child, you can turn it into a game. For a young child, you might want to suggest that she name her toes. Then your child can decide when each one has “had enough” and is ready to relax. Or you might want to create a challenge for each muscle that is being contracted. For example, when your child bends over, you might want to see how far downward he can bend... or how close he can get his chin to his chest, etc.

Spending the time with your child carrying out this exercise will be helpful in itself. Remember, these exercises work best for your child, if you first learn them for yourself, even if you don’t have a pain problem. These are healthy exercises to enhance feelings of well-being.

## FAVORITE PLACE

When your child is stressed or the pain has escalated, you can help him go, in his imagination, to a “favorite place.” He can be encouraged to really let himself “be there” and look around, listen, and experience what it feels like being there. The point of having a favorite place is to develop somewhere a child can “go” to feel safe and comfortable. This is especially important for children with chronic pain because they often feel off balance and uncomfortable. Feeling good and having positive emotions can help in the healing process and deep relaxation also helps reduce the stress response in the body during pain.

One girl who had been in a wheelchair for two years because of total body pain was too anxious to picture herself dancing in her favorite place (she used to dance before her chronic pain problem), so she imagined herself at the dance studio “watching” herself dance and over time the watching gradually merged into the experiencing... when she was ready. In this way, the favorite place can also be used by a child to learn coping skills and to try a feared activity in small increments.

## MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

Mindful awareness can be a useful tool to help children and adolescents with chronic pain. Often chronic pain invokes fear: fear of the unknown, fear that something is terribly wrong with one’s body, fear of what school peers might think, and fear of losing control. Being able to cultivate mindful awareness of one’s pain can help a child accept many of the feelings associated with the pain as well as give him insight into ways of actually controlling and regulating the pain.

Steven Weisman, M.D.,<sup>48</sup> talks about “mindful awareness” and offers a meditative exercise.

*So how does one learn mindful awareness? I believe that this door is opened through learning the practice of mindfulness meditation. Long ago described by the Buddha as one of the means to overcome suffering, mindfulness meditation has been used extensively as a stress reduction technique as well as in pain treatment plans. Traditionally, mindfulness meditation uses simple awareness of the breath to help focus the mind as it runs and jumps from thought to thought or sensation to sensation. It literally takes only 1 to 2 minutes to learn the basic fundamentals of mindfulness meditation.*

*Simply find a comfortable, upright posture. If it is too uncomfortable to sit upright, lie down. The sitting posture tends to keep you from falling asleep. Some people find*

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48 Steven Weisman, M.D., Jane B. Pettit Chair in Pain Management, Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin

*it helpful to sit on a cushion, but sitting in a chair or on a bench is perfectly fine. The arms can comfortably drop down from the shoulders and then the forearms can be placed on the thighs or in one's lap. You may keep your eyes open, gently gazing ahead, possibly at a spot on the floor or a wall. You might also choose to close your eyes. After a moment or two check in with yourself so that you feel comfortable, and direct your attention to your breath. Feel the air as it moves through your nostrils or mouth. Feel the breath as it fills your abdomen. Feel the abdomen rise up and then deflate down. Focus your slow comfortable breaths into the lower abdomen so that your breathing becomes regular and deep.*

*As you do this, it is natural for your attention to wander onto other thoughts or feelings. As you become aware of these thoughts and feelings rising up, acknowledge that your mind has wandered and then simply and gently, guide it back to your breath. Continue this for several minutes. If you notice some discomfort in your body due to your posture, with awareness of the body, shift to a more acceptable position. Try this when you awaken in the morning, or when you have a few spare moments. Surely you can find a few moments to practice in the evening or even before going to bed.*

*Below is a simple breath poem to help guide the breath during sitting meditation.*

*Breathing in, I know I am breathing in....*

*Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out.*

*Breathing in, I calm my body.....Breathing out, I smile.*

*Breathing in, I am aware of the present moment.....*

*Breathing out, I offer love to my body.*

*Breathing in, I calm my mind....Breathing out, I am thankful to be alive.*

*Breathing in, I release my fears....Breathing out, I release my thoughts.*

*Breathing in, I know I am breathing in....*

*Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out.*

Cultivating mindfulness can bring a profound relaxation to the body and mind. Over time, with the practice of mindful awareness, many children will notice a reduction in their pain and other symptoms. Often the “results” are not obvious. But it is precisely the moving away from the need to have “results” that often contributes to a lessening of the child’s suffering.



### How does mindfulness work?

Mindfulness has been shown to alter brain connectivity pathways that lead to calmness and compassion; brain changes have been shown to be related to the length of mindfulness practice. As a busy parent, allowing yourself 20-30 minutes of mindfulness will provide tremendous benefits for you and your child. Mindfulness allows you to notice the present moment without being stuck in the past or worrying about the future. The practice involves just being wherever you are and noticing your breathing. In that process, you might notice thoughts, bodily sensation, emotions, sounds and smells, and you can notice them, let them go, and return to your breath. A mindfulness practice helps you to develop self-compassion and equanimity, among other positive states of mind.

To help your children learn mindfulness, we refer you to the book by Susan Kaiser-Greenland (*The Mindful Child*) published in paperback<sup>13</sup>.

### PAIN PREVENTION: STRESSES AND WARNING SIGNS

Stress increases the amount of pain, reduce pain tolerance, and can cause a pain relapse. The most common time for pain to relapse is the start of the school year.

- A viral infection in your child can set off a bout of irritable bowel syndrome symptoms or headaches.
- Lack of sufficient sleep, travel, or overdoing it with an activity on a weekend can also be causes.
- Other stresses can be related to family members: parental marital discord, death of a pet, illness in a parent.

Some of these have relatively easy solutions: more rest, sleep, or just offering your child an opportunity to talk about what is bothering her. Others may not be so easy to solve. Try these five steps:

- 1 Identify *sources* of stress and help your child learn how to deal with them.
- 2 Identify *warning signs*: new headaches, excessive fatigue, irritability, or “mopiness” can be warning signs of an impending relapse of chronic pain.
- 3 *Develop a game plan* that may include some of the following strategies:
  - a Maintaining a normal schedule. Encourage your child to get out of the house and schedule plans with friends or go to school.
  - b Helping your child seek distractions. Encourage him to read something he likes, watch a funny movie, call a friend, play videogames or work on the



## HOW PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR CHILD

computer, go outside to play, be with friends, or do something physically active.

- c Encouraging your child to relax. Relaxation quiets the central nervous system and can reduce pain.
- 4 *Use medications wisely.* Drugs are not the only answer to pain and shouldn't be the first thing that you do when your child begins to complain of pain or becomes irritable. If the first thing that you do when your child has pain is to reach for medications or tell him to take a pill, this "medication first" plan will train your child to turn to medications rather than himself when he is not feeling well.
- 5 *Let your child know that you are confident he can get through this* and that it will pass. If you show that you have confidence in him, he will learn to have confidence in himself.

Now it's on to Section D and the actual, detailed, medicinal and behavioral treatments employed for children with chronic pain.