

Parents can help soothe burns treatment stress

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Credit: University of Queensland

Playful distraction can trump kisses and cuddles to reduce a child's anxiety and pain during potentially painful burns dressing changes.

A University of Queensland Child Health Research Centre (CHRC)

study has found [parents'](#) behaviour in medical appointments affects how [children](#) cope during regular treatments.

UQ PhD candidate Erin Brown of the School of Psychology and the CHRC Children's Burns and Trauma Research Group conducted an 18-month study involving 92 families of [burns patients](#) aged between one and six at Brisbane's Lady Cilento Children's Hospital.

"Up to 70 per cent of children experience severe distress during a medical [procedure](#), and my research found children often look to their parents for how to respond to the procedure itself," Ms Brown said.

"While it's common for parents to reassure their child with comforting phrases such as 'it's okay, it'll be over soon, be brave', these words actually kept the child's attention on the pain.

"Parents should instead remain calm and confident and divert their child's attention away from the procedure by using distractions such as games, asking simple questions, using tablet devices, making jokes or using a favourite toy."

Ms Brown's research focused on coping mechanisms for younger children as children aged under three years account for up to 70 per cent of children who present at the Lady Cilento Children's Hospital with burns.

While [distraction techniques](#) may seem simple and obvious, Ms Brown said parents were often overwhelmed in hospital with their child, especially if they had been involved in the accident that resulted in injury.

"Even though a hot beverage scold or a [burn](#) in the kitchen is common, parents still carry a lot of guilt around the injury," she said.

"My research found when parents are feeling anxious or distressed about the accident itself that affects how they are able to help their child cope during procedures.

"I've identified simple tips to help parents support their child and manage their own stress."

The tips for parents include:

- Use a noisy toy as a distraction
- Prepack snacks and share them during the procedure
- Do deep breathing exercises together to keep everyone calm

Provided by University of Queensland

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