

Ten Tips for Caregivers of a Child or Youth with Chronic Pain

1 Be Kind to Yourself.

Caring for a child or youth with chronic pain is challenging and can have physical, emotional, and social effects on the entire family. Taking care of yourself is essential. When you have a healthy body and mind, you can better support your child.

2 Believe Your Child When They Say They Are in Pain.

Because pain is invisible, friends or relatives may not believe that your child's pain is real. Regardless of the cause of the pain, listen to your child without dismissing their symptoms, feelings, or concerns. You can help your child feel understood and supported by affirming what they share with you about their pain.

3 Help Your Child Take Charge of Their Pain Care.

As your child gets older, help them identify ways to learn about and manage their pain. For example, you can encourage your child to:

- Start taking their medication independently;
- Practice their physiotherapy exercises;
- Make a list of their questions or concerns for upcoming appointments.

Participating in their care will help a child feel more in control of their pain and improve their quality of life.

4 Adapt and Adjust as Your Child's Needs Change.

Children and youth with chronic pain should do their normal activities as much as possible. Still, it is okay to make changes that help your child function better. Feel free to ask your child's healthcare team about supports, such as online schooling, mobility aids, or support groups.

5 Listen to What Your Child Needs From You.

Everyone experiences chronic pain differently, and the support your child needs will change over time. It is natural to want to comfort your child by stating that everything will be okay, but you don't always have to be positive. Sit with your child in the present moment and acknowledge how hard things are, to help your child feel heard, validated, and understood.

6 Help Your Child Set Realistic Expectations About Their Pain.

One of the goals of chronic pain treatment is to improve a child's function and to minimize their pain as much as possible. Completely eliminating their pain may not be possible and this reality can be tough to accept. You and your child may find it helpful to get professional mental health support. It is possible to be both realistic about your child's pain and hopeful for the future.



7 Help Other Family Members Understand Your Child's Pain.

While it's important to keep family members updated, your child may not want to explain and re-explain their health situation. It can be helpful for you to take this role. Have a conversation with your child, ask what information they feel comfortable sharing with relatives, and offer to share it for them. Respect your child's privacy if they do not want to share certain things.



8 Talk to Your Child's School.

Teachers may not always trust your child when they say they are in pain. This is more common when your child does not have an official diagnosis. You can support your child by contacting their teachers, school counsellors, and administrators. Explain your child's pain and help your child's school create a support plan. If challenges arise, you can ask your child's healthcare team to document how the school can help your child succeed.



9 Avoid Googling Everything.

When your child is living with chronic pain, it is natural to want to find out as much information as you can. Using the Internet to learn about your child's symptoms or condition can help somewhat, however, extensive Googling can cause unnecessary fear and anxiety. Everyone is different, and what is true for some people with chronic pain may not be true for your child. Bring questions or concerns to your child's healthcare team and ask them to suggest evidence-based resources.



10 Celebrate Achievements - Even Small Ones.

Living with chronic pain can be incredibly difficult, and small tasks can feel like major challenges. Your child may feel like their efforts to take part in daily life go unnoticed. You can encourage your child by offering praise and validation for small achievements. For example, finishing a day of school, spending a few extra minutes on the stationary bike, or taking on more responsibility in managing their health.



Additional Resources

Coping with the effects of chronic pain can be difficult, but you don't have to do it alone. Please use the following resources to find additional support for you and your child.

- **BC Children's Hospital - Pain Management & Comfort Webpage:** <http://www.bcchildrens.ca/health-info/pain-management-comfort>
- **BC Children's Hospital - Family Resource Pain Guide for Caregivers:** <https://cw-bc.libguides.com/pain>
- **SickKids - Pain Learning Hub:** <https://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/pain>
- **MyCarePath:** <https://mycarepath.ca>
- **Solutions for Kids in Pain - Guide to Chronic Pain in Students:** <https://kidsinpain.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/FINAL-English-Guide-to-Chronic-Pain-in-Students-1.pdf>

