

Responses to Pain by Age or Development

Age Group	Understanding of Pain	Behavioral Response	Verbal Description
		Infants	
6 months	No understanding of pain; is responsive to parental anxiety	Generalized body movements, chin quivering, facial grimacing, poor feeding	Cries
6–12 months	Has a pain memory; <i>is responsive to parental anxiety</i>	Reflex withdrawal to stimulus, facial grimacing, disturbed sleep, irritability, restlessness	Cries
		Toddlers	
1–3 years	Does not understand what causes pain and why they might be experiencing it	Localized withdrawal, resistance of entire body, aggressive behavior, disturbed sleep	Cries and screams, can't describe intensity /type of pain; <i>Use words for pain such as owie and boo-boo</i>
		Preschoolers	
3–6 years (preoperational)	Pain is a hurt; Does not relate pain to illness; may relate pain to an injury; <i>Often believes pain is punishment; Unable to understand why a painful procedure will help them feel better or why an injection takes the pain away</i>	Active physical resistance, directed aggressive behavior, strikes out physically and verbally when hurt, low frustration level	Has language skills to express pain on a sensory level; Can identify location and intensity of pain, denies pain, may believe his or her pain is obvious to others
		School-Age Children	
7–9 years (concrete operations)	Doesn't understand cause of pain; Understands simple relationships between pain and disease and need for painful procedures to treat disease ; May associate pain with feeling bad or angry; recognize psychologic pain related to grief and hurt feelings	Passive resistance, clenches fists, holds body rigidly still, suffers emotional withdrawal, engages in <i>plea bargaining</i>	Can specify location and intensity of pain and describes pain physical characteristics in relation to body parts
10–12 years (transitional)	Better understanding of relationship between an event and pain; More complex awareness of physical and psychologic pain, (moral dilemmas , mental pain)	May pretend comfort to project bravery, <i>may regress with stress and anxiety</i>	Able to describe intensity and location with more characteristics, able to describe psychologic pain
		Adolescents	
13–18 years (formal operations)	Has a capacity for sophisticated and complex understanding of causes of physical and mental pain; Recognizes pain has qualitative and quantitative characteristics; <i>Can relate to pain experienced by others</i>	Want to behave in socially acceptable manner -like adults; controlled response; May not complain if given <i>cues from other healthcare providers</i>	More sophisticated descriptions with experience; may think nurses are in tune with their thoughts, so don't need to tell nurse about their pain