

Are You Okay? Parents' Responses to their Children's Everyday Pains

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Background

- Although minor bumps and scrapes rarely result in serious injury, *everyday pains* are common in young children.
- Each incident presents a valuable opportunity to learn how to cope with pain.
- Parents' responses, in particular, may provide important information on how children should respond to pain.
- We explored parents' responses when their young children experienced everyday pains.

Method

Play Session 1
2 hrs.
17 children

Play Session 2
2 hrs.
17 children

Play Session 3
2 hrs.
18 children

52 children (24 girls, 28 boys)
12-32 months old ($M = 21.04$; $SD = 6.02$)
& their parents (48 mothers, 4 fathers)



An *everyday pain* is any event of bodily contact with a person or object that is
a) judged to result in at least momentary, minor discomfort; and/or
b) results in a distress, anger, or protective reaction from the child.

Measures -

Parents completed:

- A basic demographic questionnaire.
- Toddler Temperament Scale (Fullard et al., 1984)
 - 9 subscale scores and a difficult temperament composite score (i.e., total of rhythmicity, approach, adaptability, intensity, and mood subscales).

Trained coders completed:

- The Dalhousie Everyday Pain Scale-Revised (2007)
 - Inter-rater reliability on parent responses ranged from good – excellent (75%-100%).

Results

- 71% of children experienced 1 or more incidents (incident rate: 0.57 incidents/child/hour).
- 12% of pain incidents were not noticed by parents & 28% of the time parents noticed but did not respond.
- Of the incidents that parents responded to:
 - 62% were followed by a verbal response from parents including,
 - Checking in – “are you okay?” (21%)
 - Saying “oops!” or “oh-oh!” (20%)
 - Reassuring (“you’ll be ok”) or telling them to be more careful (4% each).
 - 76% were followed by nonverbal response from parents including,
 - Staying closer (19%)
 - Giving a hug/kiss (18%)
 - Removing them from the setting (14%).
- Despite initial distress levels ranging from 0-5, all children were rated as having no distress after 1 min., regardless of parental response.

Effect of Age and Temperament

- Parents were likely to stay close to older children ($r = -.36$) and to pick up younger children after an incident ($r = .45$).
- Parents of children with more difficult temperaments were more likely to respond to incidents ($r = .32$).

Conclusions

Parents generally attend to children's everyday pains by checking in and providing comfort, but responses vary with age and temperament. Future research will examine the impact of parental response to children's everyday pains on their pain, distress, and coping during subsequent painful events.