Having an illness or surgery can be very stressful for a child. How we talk to a child about pain can help him recover faster or slower. Here are some ideas for comforting language.

Rather than use the words "hurt" or "pain" before a procedure ("This may hurt a bit, but it will soon be over."), say:

- "This may bug you a bit."
- "This may bother you some."

If he says "Is it going to hurt?" or "I know it is going to hurt," answer with:

- "Maybe a little, but you will probably be surprised how little it bothers you or how short it lasts."

If he looks like he is uncomfortable, or you need to know if he is, just ask:

- "How are you feeling?" rather than "Do you hurt?" or "Are you having pain?"
- You can also phrase it "Tell me what you are feeling?" or "Tell me about your symptoms."

When using the "pain scale", rather than ask "Where is your pain level now?", say:

- "Where is your level of comfort now?"

Rather than say "I've got some medicine for your pain," say "I have something to make you more comfortable."

Repeating suggestions of what you DON'T want for the child will only create more of the same problem. Say what action or behavior you DO want.

- Rather than "Don't wiggle around so much while I change your bandage," say,"I wonder how quietly and comfortable you can lay here while I change your bandage."
- Rather than "I don't want you to hurt," say "I want you to feel good (or comfortable)."

The mind can not do two things at the same time. Have your child focus on his favorite place. This should be a safe place where he feels special. Have him describe it using all of his senses (what he notices, hears, feels, smells, etc.). While he is thinking about that, he can't focus on the pain.

Rather than have a child "try" something, encourage him to "do it." The word "try" implies failure. Encourage positive outcomes.

- Say "Take this medicine to help you" instead of "Try this medicine and see if it helps."
It is the language and the care we use that makes a difference – every word counts. What we say creates the outcomes.

Ask him what he has already tried to make himself feel more comfortable. Remind him that he is in control of his body. Praise him for what a good job he is doing to make himself comfortable.