



Enhancing Pediatric Surgical Experiences:

Equipping Ambulatory Surgery Centers with Child Life Techniques to Reduce Stress and Increase Coping, Utilizing Hearts Connected Pediatric Surgical Prep Program (PSPP)

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Abstract:

Pediatric surgical procedures often induce anxiety and stress in young patients and their families (Pearson, 1941). This white paper discusses the value of providing Ambulatory Surgery Center (ASC) staff with specialized training in the Hearts Connected Pediatric Surgical Prep Program (PSPP). Pediatric surgical procedures, especially in ASCs, can be distressing experiences for young patients and their families. The PSPP training program utilizes Child Life techniques, taught by Certified Child Life Specialists (CCLS), to alleviate stress, enhance coping mechanisms, and improve the overall experience for pediatric surgical patients. This program also educates staff on the pediatric pain experience, taught by an RN and Pain Management Coordinator, and enhances the tools and techniques of surgical staff for pain management support. Drawing on research and expert opinions, this paper highlights the role of the Hearts Connected team to equip and train pediatric surgical staff in Child Life techniques that will address the emotional and psychosocial needs of pediatric patients. Creating a more positive and child-centered healthcare environment, ASCs can effectively decrease pain and trauma and increase patient satisfaction.

Introduction:

Pediatric surgical procedures are pivotal moments in a child's healthcare journey, often accompanied by anxiety, fear, and stress for both the patient and their caregivers. While pediatric surgical interventions are often stressful for both children and caregivers, ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs) have a unique opportunity (Getchell, 2022) to provide comprehensive emotional support to pediatric patients. Certified Child Life Specialists (CCLS), with specialized training in child development and psychosocial support, assess and prepare pediatric surgical patients, identifying stressors and facilitating developmentally appropriate coping mechanisms. This paper explores the adaptation of Child Life techniques in ASCs, partnered with an understanding of the pediatric pain experience, with the goal to decrease stress and increase coping (Brewer, 2006).

The Role of Certified Child Life Specialists: Certified Child Life Specialists (CCLS) focus on minimizing the emotional and psychological impacts of healthcare experiences on pediatric patients and their families. CCLS are trained professionals who focus on promoting optimal development and reducing the psychological and emotional impact of healthcare experiences on children and their families. Their interventions include preparing for and supporting children during medical procedures, employing distraction techniques, providing emotional support, and teaching coping strategies. Integrating CCLS techniques into ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs) offers the potential for improved pediatric healthcare experiences, reduced anxiety and post-operative pain, and enhanced patient outcomes. (Davidson, 2016).

Benefits of Certified Child Life Specialists (CCLS) in Ambulatory Surgery Centers (ASCs):

1. **Stress Reduction:** Child Life techniques can involve therapeutic play, relaxation methods, and age-appropriate explanations tailored to the child's developmental understanding, which can ease children's fears and concerns about surgery, (Grissim, 2020).
2. **Preparation:** ASCs can utilize Child Life techniques to prepare children for surgery using visual aids, demystifying the process, and empowering children to understand what will happen, while offering predictability for the surgical process. (Manyande, 2015).
3. **Distraction Techniques:** During pre-operative procedures, ASC staff can utilize Child Life techniques, engaging children in games, toys, and activities to divert their attention from stress-inducing thoughts (Lujúan, 2020). Distraction is also an effective post-operative pain intervention. (Helgadóttir, H. L., & Wilson, M. E. 2014).
4. **Support for Families:** ASCs can provide guidance to families on how to best support their child through the entire surgical experience, promoting and enhancing a sense of comfort and reassurance (Claridge, 2020).
5. **Coping Skills Education:** CCLS can teach the staff at ASCs how to implement coping strategies that will benefit pediatric patients not only during the surgery but also in future medical encounters (Chicas, 2023).
6. **Decreased post-operative pain:** Pediatric pain education, distraction, and psychological interventions that alleviate anxiety have been shown to decrease post-operative pain. (Ickmans, 2022; Davidson, 2016).

Considerations for Implementation:

- 1. Educational Collaboration:** Collaborating with Certified Child Life Specialists (CCLS) for training fosters a comprehensive and coordinated approach between surgical teams, anesthesiologists, and nursing staff.
- 2. Training and Proficiency:** Staff should receive specialized training and maintain a level of competency in applying Child Life techniques to pediatric patients.
- 3. Resource Allocation:** ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs) should designate child-friendly spaces and resources to effectively employ Child Life techniques for interactions with patients and families.
- 4. Evaluation and Continuous Improvement:** Regular evaluation of the program's impact and ongoing refinement of interventions and techniques are essential for continued success. Evaluation of the interventions is supported by evidence that implementation of specific interventions increases patient and family satisfaction, creating a safe and secure healthcare environment in ASDs.

Conclusion:

Integrating Child Life techniques, utilizing the Hearts Connected Pediatric Surgical Prep Program taught by Certified Child Life Specialists (CCLS), into ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs) has the potential to significantly improve the surgical experience for pediatric patients and their families. By addressing emotional needs, decreasing anxiety, improving pain management and education, and amplifying coping mechanisms, ASCs can foster a child-centered healthcare environment. While CCLS set the standard, ASCs can adapt their techniques to enhance emotional well-being, demonstrating a commitment to pediatric care in an evolving healthcare landscape. Prioritizing the psychological well-being of pediatric patients should be a central focus of health care providers, and Hearts Connected CCLS can play a pivotal role in achieving this goal with their innovative Pediatric Surgical Prep Program.

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