

# PARENTS' EMOTIONAL WELLNESS:

## REDUCE DISTRESS, EMOTIONAL SUPPORT, AND PARTNERSHIP (DEP) GUIDE FOR SUPPORTING PARENTS DURING A YOUNG CHILD'S ILLNESS

Will help in identifying sources of anxiety, fears, and concerns, providing emotional support, and engaging with parents and families to mitigate stress.

### DISTRESS

Questions to ask parents to assess distress in families	Tips to help reduce distress in families
<p><b>Assess newborn's/young infant's pain.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ How do you think your child is doing right now?</li> <li>✓ How is the child's pain right now?</li> <li>✓ What was the worst thing that happened since you came to the hospital?</li> </ul> <p><b>Gauge fears and worries.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ What has been scary or upsetting for you?</li> <li>✓ What worries you the most?</li> </ul> <p><b>Address grief or loss.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Was anyone else hurt or ill?</li> <li>✓ Have you had other recent losses (home, family member)?</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Provide parent with as much control as possible.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help the parent understand what is happening.</li> <li>• Allow the parent to have a say in what will happen next.</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>2. Actively assess and treat the child's pain.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimize pain and exposure to bright lights/loud sounds.</li> <li>• Teach parent basic coping techniques, e.g., breastfeeding, non-nutritive suckling, actively distracting, swaddling, and singing to the child during procedures.</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>3. Provide accurate information, using basic words.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask the parent to repeat back explanations.</li> <li>• Listen carefully and clarify misconceptions.</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>4. Provide reassurance, realistic hope, and comfort with dignity.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe what is being done to help the child feel better.</li> <li>• Address the parent's concerns or worries.</li> <li>• Find a quiet, private place to talk and project warmth, interest, and respect.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

### EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Questions to ask parents to assess the family's emotional needs	Tips to help provide emotional support to families
<p><b>Assess child's current needs.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ What helps you or your child cope when upset/scared?</li> </ul> <p><b>Identify who will be able to support the child.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Do you understand the illness/injury or treatment?</li> <li>✓ Can you be with your child during procedures?</li> <li>✓ Can you help calm/soothe their child?</li> </ul> <p><b>Identify barriers to mobilizing parent support.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ How confident are you in caring for the child?</li> <li>✓ Think to yourself: Do any of the parents' responses make it harder for them to help?</li> <li>✓ What would make it easier for you to help care for the child?</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Listen to parents and encourage their presence.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask parents for their expertise about their child.</li> <li>• Ask parents about their concerns.</li> <li>• Encourage them to be with their child.</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>2. Empower parents to help their child.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggest ways they can help their child—soothing/comforting, ACTIVE distraction before and during procedures.</li> <li>• Involve them in physical/clinical care, as appropriate.</li> <li>• Help them seek out support if upset/anxious.</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>3. Encourage child/parent involvement in "normal" activities.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggest activities that the child and parent can do together, e.g., reading, singing, story telling.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

### PARTNERSHIP

Questions to ask parents to assess how family is coping (including beyond medical)	Tips to help families cope with bereavement for the current medical situation and other issues that are impacting them
<p><b>Assess distress of family members.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ How is your family coping right now?</li> <li>✓ Who is having an especially difficult time?</li> <li>✓ What does your family think about it?</li> </ul> <p><b>Gauge family stressors and resources.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Are you eating, getting sleep, and taking breaks?</li> <li>✓ Do you have friends who can help out at home?</li> </ul> <p><b>Address other needs (beyond medical).</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Are there other stressors going on (such as money, job, transportation) that make it particularly difficult right now?</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Encourage parents' basic self-care.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage parents to sleep, eat, and take breaks.</li> <li>• Help them enlist support of friends, family, and community.</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>2. Remember other family members' needs.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve siblings and explain treatment to them when possible.</li> <li>• Enlist hospital resources such as chaplain and social work as needed.</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>3. Be sensitive to the cultural and resource needs of the family.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember that outside issues can impact recovery.</li> <li>• Connect families with community resources they trust.</li> <li>• Show respect by working with the family.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

Adapted from Healthcare Toolbox