

Guide to Chronic Pain in Students:

AN IN-SCHOOL RESOURCE





About Solutions for Kids in Pain (SKIP)

Solutions for Kids in Pain (SKIP) is a knowledge mobilization network, based at Dalhousie University and co-led by Children's Healthcare Canada, that seeks to bridge the gap between current treatment practices and available evidence-based solutions for children's pain in Canadian health institutions. SKIP's vision is healthier Canadians through better pain management for children, with a mission to improve children's pain management by mobilizing evidence-based solutions through coordination and collaboration. SKIP brings together Canada's world-renowned pediatric pain research community, front-line knowledge user organizations and end beneficiaries.

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Background

Chronic pain can impact a student's ability to function in school settings, but support can significantly improve their ability to cope at school. This resource aims to provide teachers and school staff information about chronic pain in youth and a resource bank of clinical strategies that can be used in class with students with chronic pain.

The Guide to Chronic Pain in Students: An In-School Resource was adapted from the Pain Special Interest Group Clinical Committee from the Society of Pediatric Psychology.

Guide to Chronic Pain in Students: An In-School Resource

For
Teachers!

What is chronic pain in kids and youth?

What is important for the school system to understand

- 1 in 5 kids and youth (<18 years old) in Canada experience chronic pain
- >50% of students with chronic pain miss significant amounts of school
- Clinical intervention is only experienced by 5-15% of children and youth with chronic pain
- 2/3 of kids with chronic pain become adults with chronic pain
- Chronic pain, lack of sleep, and other exacerbated symptoms can make concentrating difficult

Causes and symptoms of chronic pain

- Can begin as acute pain from injury, disease, surgery, or from no identified cause
- Persistent, recurrent, and lasts more than three months
- Headaches, abdominal pain, joint pain, and more
- Sometimes, there are no outward signs of chronic pain - may be 'invisible'
- There is no "cure" that ends chronic pain

Mental health and chronic pain

- Anxiety and depression are commonly seen in youth with chronic pain
 - social phobias, separation anxiety, and panic attacks are also common
- Maintaining social connections with peers can be difficult
- There is a connection between sleep, chronic pain, and depressive symptoms

How is chronic pain treated in kids?

In-school support

- Meet with student(s) and parents/guardians to co-develop an in-class pain management plan
- Try not to employ protective responses to pain, like lowered homework expectations, unless included in plan
- Implement strategies the whole class can practice together, like breathing and/or stretching breaks

Advocate for/support in-school accommodations

- Assess specific in-class concerns as they arise
 - extended time on tests
 - stop-the-clock breaks
 - frequent breaks
 - provide a quiet space for an anxiety or pain flare
 - allow flexibility with the absenteeism policy
 - other strategies developed with the student

Relaxation, exercise, distraction

- See "Pain Management Tools for Students with Chronic Pain"

DID YOU KNOW: Chronic pain should be supported using the "3P approach"

1. physical
2. psychological
3. pharmacological

Guide to Chronic Pain in Students: Pain Management Tools



Suggestions to Assess & Manage Anxiety for Students with Chronic Pain

Assess for level of anxiety about school and pain

Signs of typical anxieties:

- worrying about health
- worrying about pain
- worrying about social engagement
- worrying about school workload

Signs a student may need more support:

- outward signs of distress or pain
- fears are not easily calmed
- impaired function/engagement
- falling behind on school workload

Consider recommendations and/or interventions

- Establish an in-school routine
 - meals, hydration, social time
- Prepare and know the in-school pain management plan
- Assess specific concerns and work to monitor positive/negative thoughts
 - e.g., How does worry impact pain?

Anxiety/Worry Management Strategies

In the moment strategies:

- breathing & mindfulness
- stretching or exercise
- counting backwards from 10
- taking a short break

Suggestions for Mood Boosting Activities for Students with Chronic Pain

Be creative with activities

- Keeping a bullet journal
- Drawing feelings in a sketchbook
- Going outside to play
- Listening to fun music

DID YOU KNOW: Short exercise can help pain management, improve focus and increase motivation.

Find ways for the student to contribute

- Tutoring a younger student
- Doing something to feel proud
 - help the teacher with classroom activities
 - show a new student around the school
- Learning a new skill and volunteering to teach it to someone

Pacing is important!

- Ensure activities align with the in-school pain management plan.
- Try to balance fun with school time and down time.
- Encourage saying "yes" when someone invites the student to participate in an activity, but know chronic pain boundaries.
- Suggest committing to an activity for at least 5 mins - getting started is the hardest part!

MY IN-CLASS PAIN PLAN

Name:

Grade:

Date:

Hi, I live with chronic pain. I would like you to know a bit about how pain can affect me at school and how you could support me to manage my pain during the school day.

I OFTEN HAVE PAIN IN...

MY PAIN FEELS LIKE...

WHEN I HAVE PAIN AT SCHOOL, YOU MAY NOTICE I...

WHEN I HAVE PAIN AT SCHOOL, WHAT HELPS ME IS...

WHEN I HAVE PAIN AT SCHOOL, YOU CAN SUPPORT ME BY...

Teacher signature:

Parent/caregiver signature:

Student signature:

MY IN-CLASS PAIN PLAN

Name:

Grade:

*Hi, I live with chronic pain.
I would like you to know a bit
about how pain can affect me
at school and how you could
support me to manage my pain
during the school day.*

I often have pain in...

My pain feels like...

When I have pain at school, you may notice I...

When I have pain at school, what helps me is...

When I have pain at school, you can support me by...

Teacher signature:

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