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| **Age** | **Developmental Characteristics** | **Hospital Stressors** | **How to Help** |
| **Toddlers (1-2 years)** | * Strives for independence​ * Sensory motor learning through exploration​ * Short attention span | * Unfamiliar environment​ * Altered routines​ * Fear of separation and pain​ * Stranger anxiety​ * Loss of autonomy | * Offer choices when appropriate​ * Comfort positioning with parent as comforter, never restrainer​ * Begin exam with something familiar​ * Allow child to “help” with care​ * Allow time to rest between procedures​ * Give one direction at a time |
| **Pre-School (3-5 years)** | * Egocentric​ * Difficulty distinguishing between reality and fantasy (magical thinking)​ * Limited concept of time​ * Learn best by doing​ * Need for caregiver under stress | * View illness and treatment as punishment​ * Fear of abandonment/separation​ * Misconceptions and inability to distinguish fantasy from reality​ * Fear of pain | * Give them a “job” during exam​ * Give choices and control​ * Use simple, concrete language​ * Reinforce exam is not punishment, explain reasoning for things, talk before touch​ * Medical Play​ * Anticipate and clarify misconceptions |
| **School- Age (6-12 years)** | * Able to think logically​ * Self-esteem evolving​ * Establishing same-sex peer groups | * Separation related to disruption in daily living  (school and peers)​ * Modesty concerns​ * Fear of body injury and never being well again​ * Enforced dependence | * Explain reason and purpose for things​ * Check for misunderstandings​ * Reinforce their body is “normal” or “intact”​ * Teach about equipment and function by introducing medical terms​ * Provide opportunities for success |
| **Adolescents (13-18 years)** | * Rapidly changing body image​ * Need for privacy​ * Body image relates to self-esteem​ * Socializing and peer group important​ * Risk-taking behavior | * Invasion of privacy​ * Lack of confidentiality​ * Concern for body image and physical changes​ * Dependency​ * Separation from peers | * Communicate honestly​ * Include patient in decision making​ * Support independence​ * Respect privacy​ * Allow choices, let them decide who accompanies to exam room​ * Allow them to ask questions |