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# Communicating with children about 'everyday' pain: an opportunity for life-long learning?

Sarah B Wallwork, Melanie Noel & G Lorimer Moseley



'Everyday' pain experiences (bumps, cuts, scratches) are common during childhood. Children's pain experiences can be guided by social contexts, including parent/carer modelling and responses [1], sibling and/or peer relationships, and wider social, cultural and environmental contexts.

These experiences may be fundamental in determining a child's ongoing beliefs, thoughts and behaviours surrounding pain and injury. We sought to understand contemporary perspectives on how parents and caregivers can best utilise these every day pain experiences to promote adaptive pain beliefs and behaviours.

## OBJECTIVE

Determine expert opinion on the key messages and strategies that parents/caretakers can consider when communicating with young children (aged 2-7 years) about 'everyday' pains.

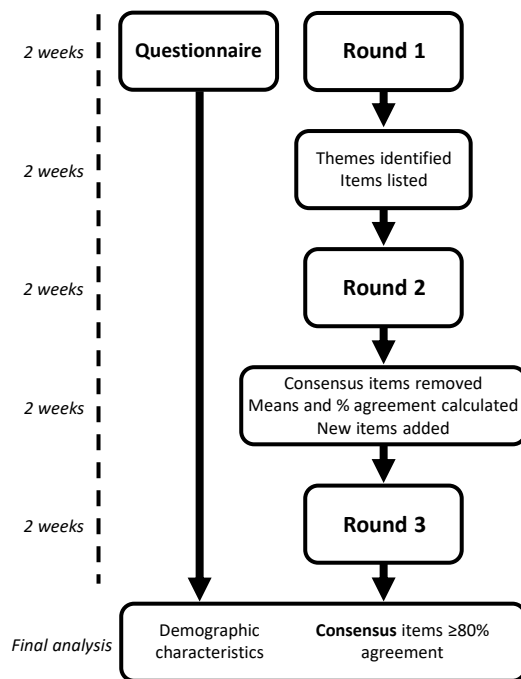
## METHODS

A 3 round Delphi survey (Fig).

Experts were asked "In your expert opinion, what are the key messages that can be communicated to children (aged 2 – 7 years), within the context of a child experiencing 'everyday' pain, that are most likely to encourage them to have an understanding of pain and injury the promotes recovery and resilience".

Follow-up questions prompted broader aspects such as age, gender, and communication strategies.

Themes and items were generated from expert responses. These items were sent to experts in rounds 2 and 3; experts were asked to rank how important they believed each item to be on a 9-point Likert scale. Consensus was defined as  $\geq 80\%$  agreement among experts.



References: [1] Chambers et al., 2002, *J Ped Psychol*, 27(3):293-301; [2] IASP 2020 Revised definition of pain; [3] Moseley & Butler 2017 *Explain Pain Supercharged*.

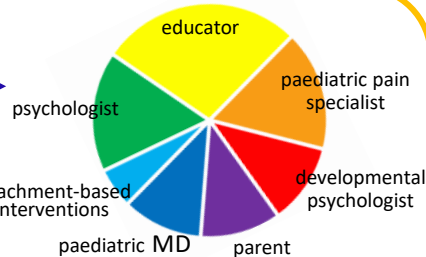
## RESULTS

- 18 experts
- 89%-100% response rate
- 12 themes were identified (Table)
- 253 items were raised
- 187 items reached consensus

## THEMES

### Key themes:

- Understanding 'how pain works', including messages that echo the current evidence-based understanding of pain and injury [2,3]
- Reassurance
- Normalising pain
- Educating that pain can be influenced by multiple factors and not simply tissue injury
- Validation of pain
- Supporting children's emotional development
- Empowerment – learning to manage their own pain and injury



### Optimal communication strategies:

- Role modelling
- Carer response/reaction to a painful event
- Discussion 'in the moment'
- Discussion after the event

### Messages and communication strategies:

- "[Should not differ] between gender but differ between individual children" (P22)
- Should be tailored to the age, development and cognitive level of the child

contact: sarah.wallwork@unisa.edu.au

## Themes identified from expert responses

1	Messages about 'everyday' pain
2	Messages specific to when pain is not associated with injury
3	Ways to communicate messages about pain
4	Parent/caretaker response to a pain experience: general ideas
5	Parent/caretaker response to a pain experience: attend to the child and validate their pain and injury
6	Parent/caretaker response to a pain experience: encourage exploring of emotions/interoception
7	Empowering children and promoting resilience
8	Tailoring communication about 'everyday' pain for different ages
9	Differences in communicating about 'everyday' pain between genders
10	Behaviour and emotion modelling when observing another in pain
11	Observing another in pain is an opportunity for empathy building
12	When observing another in pain – help children process the experience

## CONCLUSIONS

This diverse set of childhood, pain and parenting experts reached consensus on 187 items, yielding 12 key themes to consider when using everyday pain experiences to promote adaptive pain beliefs and behaviours in young children.