

Helping Children to Be Effective Partners in Their Own Health Care

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INTRODUCTION

For many people, the thought of visiting the doctor (or a school nurse) might generate feelings of nervousness, anxiety, or even fear. Whether a medical office is located in a high-rise office building, a small clinic in a developing country, or in a room next to the principal's office, the possibility of being overwhelmed by the impending visit is the same. Why is this so? Can anything be done to improve the interaction between medical professionals and patients—especially when those patients are children? What role might schools have in teaching children how to communicate with those who provide medical care?

INFORMATION, MOTIVATION, AND STRATEGIES

Just like anyone else, children need three specific things in order to change health behaviors. First, they need **information**—if they don't understand what they *should* be doing, it will be almost impossible for them to do those things. Second, they need **motivation**—simply knowing what to do isn't enough; they must also *want* to do it. Third, they need **strategies** that can help them to overcome barriers and achieve the goals that they have set for themselves.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Nemours KidsHealth.org: Nemours has age-appropriate resources such as games, medical dictionaries, quizzes, movies, tips, and recipes for parents.

- Children: http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/?WT.ac=t2p_tab
- Children and young adults: http://kidshealth.org/en/kids/?ref=p2k_tab
- Miscellaneous topics: how the body works, staying healthy, nutrition and fitness, and emotions and behavior: http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/?WT.ac=k2t_tab

•For more resources, view article at <https://jae.adventist.org/2017.2.4>

Print and Picture Books to Help Prepare Children for Medical Procedures:

- Adventist HealthCare Recommended Books:* <http://www.adventisthealthcare.com/services/pediatrics/books/#.VxZtrfkrJaQ>
- Vanderbilt University Medical Center Books for Children About Hospital Stay or Illness:* <http://www.childrenshospital.vanderbilt.org/guid...>
- Little Parachutes Picture Books to Help Children With Life Changes:* <http://www.littleparachutes.com/subcategory.php?sid=25>

CONCLUSION

Adventists recognize the more familiar parts of the health message—eating a plant-based diet, avoiding harmful habits such as smoking, and so on. But we may overlook the importance of engaging in medical decision-making and working with our healthcare providers to make the best choices for ourselves as individuals. Many of us don't practice dialoguing with our doctors. We may swallow our questions. We may be passive rather than active participants. However, this need not be true for the next generations. We can begin early to teach children how to be engaged partners in their own health care, and in this way, bring them closer to fulfilling the duty of stewardship over their bodies, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

LINK TO REFERENCES

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