



Adjusting stoma education to meet the needs of the child and family

When working in paediatrics, healthcare professionals have to address the needs of two audiences; the patient (child) and the child's family. Addressing the needs of these two groups can be challenging, especially when it comes to stoma care education. To reach both groups effectively, stoma education has to draw on the educational principles for children and those for adults.

This article is based on the recently-published paediatric stoma care best practice guidelines¹. It highlights how stoma care professionals can successfully adapt education sessions to meet the needs of both child and parent.

How to plan an education session

The key to a successful education session is good planning. Start by familiarising yourself with the child's condition and treatment plan. Try to understand the family's circumstances. In many cases, you will be opening up an entirely new world to the parents and their child. The extent to which they can take in this new information has a lot to do with their emotional state.

When people are in shock or denial, they are not ready to take in new knowledge and develop new skills. That's why it is important to be sensitive to the parents' and child's readiness to learn.

By adjusting your educational approach to accommodate the following factors, you will increase the effectiveness of the session:

- The developmental stage and age of the child; and
- The presence of any cognitive, physical or psychosocial barriers to learning.

Check out Paediatric stoma care: Global best practice guidelines for neonates, children and teenagers

Paediatric stoma care is still a relatively undescribed field, and little literature and research are available. To provide more information about this area, an international group of paediatric stoma care experts – the Global Paediatric Stoma Nurses Advisory Board (GPSNAB) – has developed global guidelines for healthcare professionals. The guidelines cover the full spectrum of paediatric stoma care, from recognising stoma indications to addressing the emotional impact of stoma surgery. To get your copy of the guidelines, visit [Coloplast Professional](#).

What to teach

The content of a stoma education session will vary depending on where you are in the child's course of treatment. For example, the topics you cover pre-surgery will differ from those you would go through post-surgery or post-discharge.

Let's take a closer look at the topics that should be covered in a post-surgery educational session².

Looking at and touching the stoma

The very first step in post-surgery stoma education is getting both the parents and the child (if age appropriate) to look at and touch the stoma. It's important that they understand that it's not painful.

Opening and emptying the pouch

When instructing parents, start with simple tasks, such as opening and emptying the pouch. Make sure you have enough time so you don't have to rush through the session. You can start by demonstrating using a doll, then on the child, and then having the parents perform the task under your supervision. The parents and/or child must master these basic tasks before the child is discharged from hospital.

Caring for the stoma and skin

A post-surgery education session should also address skin care. Here, it's important to teach the child and parents about the characteristics of healthy peristomal skin, and what they should do if a problem arises. Specifically, they need to know:

- how to clean the peristomal skin;
- how to dry it; and
- how to assess for and recognise the clinical signs of loss of integrity.

Selecting a product

Have several brands on hand for the child and parents to choose from. You should provide information on accessories as well. Keep in mind, however, that best practice in paediatric stoma care is to use as few products as possible in order to avoid an allergic reaction.

Concluding the session

For the parents and the child, this is a lot of information to take in. To conclude the session, make sure you recap of what you have presented. It's an opportunity for you to make sure the parents and child have understood what you've taught them. Try asking summary questions, such as:

- What type of stoma does your child have?
- When should the pouch be emptied?
- Name two signs indicating that the pouching system must be changed

Make sure to give them written materials on the topics you've covered, so they can review them once they get home.

Age-specific methods of instruction

As mentioned at the outset, one of the keys to effective stoma education is to take the child's age into consideration when you plan the session. Here are some tips for reaching the different age groups within paediatric care.

"At each stage of development – from infancy, preschool and school age to adolescence and young adulthood – there are special considerations in stoma care."

Special tips for teaching children

Even at a young age, children can participate in caring for their stoma. By allowing them to be a part of their own stoma care, you can help them to feel proud and useful. They may begin to view it as a game, rather than something to be feared.

1. Get them involved. Try giving children simple tasks so they feel they are a part of the process. For example, children can collect stoma supplies; draw the stoma pattern on the skin barrier paper; and hold the pouch while the skin barrier is applied on the skin.
2. Activate their imagination. Children often have very active imaginations. Take advantage of this by using it as a tool for communicating with them about their stoma. For example, you can use a mascot with a stoma to show how to empty the pouch. Role-play is also a good method for teaching about pouch changes. You can use a colouring book to teach the children what they need to bring to school, or drawings that help them identify their internal organs. You can also read or tell a story about a child with a stoma.
3. Get them to express themselves. Some children might have a hard time expressing themselves verbally. Try using puppets, dolls or drawings to draw them out.
4. Use peer-to-peer instruction. Arrange for the child and parents to meet other children with a stoma and their parents. This benefits both the child and the parents. Children see that there are others like them, and the parents get the opportunity to exchange experiences, listen to other people's stories and learn from what they have done. This can help diminish anxiety and help them realise that they are not alone. They can also see that there are different ways of dealing with their current situation. Choose parents and children with a positive attitude, who can demonstrate that it is possible to adjust to having a child/living with a stoma.

Special tips for teaching teenagers

1. Respect privacy. When educating teenagers, it's very important to speak with the teenager first, without the parents present. Some teenagers are reluctant to talk about a part of their body that they don't normally discuss with or show their parents. They may act differently when their parents are present and many not express their true feelings. By speaking with teenagers one-on-one, you appeal to their independence, which can make it easier for them to accept the stoma as being a part of them.
2. Use peer-to-peer instruction. As was the case with children, it's also important for teenagers to meet people their own age with a stoma. They may want to look at others' stomas; talk about what clothes they wear; what activities they do; and which sports they play. Although you provide teenagers with this information as a part of educational sessions, it has more credibility when it comes from a peer in the same situation.

2. For more information on what to cover in pre-surgery, pre-discharge and postdischarge educational sessions, please consult Section B, Chapter 2 of the full version of the Paediatric guidelines.

Tips for a successful education session

Tips	Why is it important?
Make sure you have enough time	This will ensure that you can adjust the training to individual learning styles and preferences.
Check for readiness to learn and stage of grieving	This will help you see if they are ready to learn and capable of understanding what you want to teach them.
Consider the child's age and developmental stage	This will guide your teaching approach and help you use words and descriptions the child can understand.
Encourage the child to participate in his or her care	This will promote autonomy and adaption.
Use teaching aids	This will help you to adjust the education to the child's developmental age and level of understanding.
Introduce the child and parents to other children with a stoma and their parents	This will help them to understand what it is like to live with a stoma and learn from others' experiences.
Teach the teenager before teaching the parents	This will promote their feeling of responsibility in their care and respect their independence.

As mentioned at the outset, paediatric stoma education is challenging. However, with thorough preparation and age-appropriate techniques, you can help the parents and child to successfully adapt to life with a stoma.

For more practical tips and guidelines related to paediatric stoma care and education, please go to the Paediatric stoma care. Global best practice guidelines for neonates, children and teenagers. You can download your own copy at [Coloplast Professional](#).