

Background: Children Who Are Coping with Chronic Illness

by

Rachael Lacy

University of Pittsburgh

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### Children Coping with Chronic Illness

Imagine being a child under the age of twelve and diagnosed with a chronic disease. Some people may say it would be hard to believe. Some children may not quite understand what a chronic disease is, while others lost interest in daily activities with a fear of an established anxiety disorder from previous asthma attacks. Every day life-event stressors, daily activities, and environmental stressors all play a factor when children cope with a chronic disease. Children internalized their stress of their illness, which weakens physical and psychosocial aspects of life. Children who live in poverty are more likely to deal with environmental stressors (Greene, Murdock, & Mitchell, 2006).

Asthma is the most common chronic illness among children. As children develop, they take precautions and learn how to manage the illness, how to deal with treatment, and as many children have a hard time doing, the children has to change their activities (Greene et. al 2006). Children under the age of twelve have a difficulty adjusting to this tremendous lifestyle change.

Children coping with cancer have a devastating stressor put on their life. Young children may think about the pain issues rather than that life altering issues. Young children do not understand the life altering factors like older children do.

Children cope differently with chronic diseases. Children may internalize problems and this can compromise social functioning (Berz, Murdock, & Mitchell 2005). Children lack the information and self-control of handling chronic diseases. The lack of information and self control lets others understand what children stress about and how they handle it. Many children may find themselves in pain or discomfort. Parents need to be honest with children about their chronic illness (Lynch, 2005). Parents may think their children cannot understand what is going on with their body due to the disease. Children pick up on whether or not something is bothering

their parents. The parents not telling children the truth could lead to more stress and anxiety on the children. If the parents are honest, this can lead to children learning coping strategies that could help themselves and their parents. Boys tend to use cognitive coping strategies whereas girls tend to use more emotional support. Children who use coping strategies dealing with cognition rather than direct active strategies have more positive responses when talking about their chronic illness. Children think positive about their life. They see life as now not what it would have been. Children came to the conclusion that they could not change what has happened in their living situation or how their parents handled having an ill child. Children cannot avoid what happened but they can control how they felt. Children fear what others say if they go to a store with a scarf on their head from ongoing chemotherapy treatments.

Young children tend to use avoidance to cope with their chronic illness. A reason that avoidance was used was many children experienced generalized anxiety as a way to avoid the reality of the chronic disease. The Coping Questionnaire for Children assessed coping strategies for anxiety in different situations (Austin, Sciarra, 2010). According to the DSM-IV- Tr (2000), Generalized Anxiety Disorder had to be excessive anxiety for 6 months about activities. When children focused more on the environmental factors, they tended to worry more about what people around them such as friends as family would think. This would lead to high levels of stress and worry that eventually lead into anxiety. If young children focused on emotional stressors and had high self-regulation, children would have overcome the strategies for coping with chronic illness. Instead of letting the chronic illness take control of their life, the children took control of their life and overcame the stressors of a chronic illness.

Many children cope differently from one another. Many come to peace with the chronic illness and think the illness will better themselves and better the lives of others. While other children worry and stress what will happen to their family while dealing with the illness.

### References

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