

## MEDICAL PLAY DOLLS

Cloth dolls are used throughout the hospital environment as teaching and expressive tools for children. These simple dolls are one of the Child Life Specialists' strongest allies as they work to promote emotional health and well-being for sick and injured children.

The dolls are used in many ways, including:

- A tool for children as they draw facial expressions to represent visually their feeling about an upcoming procedure. Since they are blank on both sides, children can indicate ambivalent feelings by assigning different emotions to each side of the doll.

- A teaching tool upon which Specialists can demonstrate the placement of equipment needed during various procedures. Children can demonstrate their understanding as well as have some “hands-on” learning (which for children has more impact than just seeing or hearing information) by doing the procedure on the doll.



- Since many of the children who benefit from this sensory teaching are still in a “concrete” stage of development it is important that the entire body is represented as well as details—like the jointed elbow. Many procedures occur at a specific point (such as IV starts and blood draws at the elbow joint).

It is important that these areas are visually and functionally represented so these children can see where the procedure will occur and can demonstrate their understanding by “doing” the procedure on the doll in the correct location. As adults, we can easily imagine that this joint is present but preschool and early school-aged children do better when they can really see and feel this area.

- As children perform procedures on their personalized dolls, they can practice coping techniques by teaching these techniques to their pretend patients. These techniques include deep breathing, distraction and guided imagery.

- The dolls are used in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit with brothers and sisters of the patients. They are personalized by the sibling and taken home. The sibling is encouraged to hug their doll when they are lonesome and missing the hospitalized child.

