

## WHAT IS PAIN?

- The main function of pain is to tell us that something is wrong so we stop and deal with what's causing it
- While we feel pain in our bodies, pain sensation actually starts in our brains
- The brain interprets a message from the injured part of the body and decides whether to generate the sensation of pain or react in a different way
- Because pain is interpreted by the brain, pain is different for different people
- Pain is subjective to the person experiencing it. For this reason pain has to be defined as what the person says it is, where the person says it is



## TYPES OF PAIN [ACUTE VS. CHRONIC]

- There are different types of pain, including *acute* pain and *chronic* pain
- **Acute pain** is the result of an illness or injury that explains the pain. Acute pain subsides once the injury has healed.
- **Chronic pain** extends beyond the expected healing time but can be just as debilitating
- When trying to understand the pain of others, it is much easier to identify acute pain than chronic
- Levels of pain can depend on a number of factors:
  - Body tissue [cut on finger vs. leg]
  - Environment
  - Mood
  - Fatigue
  - Expectations
  - Others [personality, culture, etc.]

## PAIN AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

- People with DD often have conditions that cause chronic pain
- People with DD often use behaviour to communicate pain
- Recognition and diagnosis is often delayed, leading to too little/much medication, increased pain, increase disability

## COMMON CAUSES OF PAIN IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

- Constipation
- GERD (heartburn)
- Dental cavities
- Gum disease
- Infections (urinary tract, pneumonia)
- Osteoporosis
- Arthritis
- Cancer



### PAIN TIPS

- Tell someone if you suspect pain!
- Be aware of changes in behaviour
- Don't assume the person isn't in pain if they aren't acting 'in pain' or saying they are in pain
- Ask others who know the individual how they recognize pain
- Be aware of the person's diagnosis and related pain

#### Have a pain management plan



- Change the person's position
- Calming techniques
- Change the environment
- Engaging the person in a pleasant activity
- Reduce the noise
- Reduce situations that might cause irritation
- Ensure that the person remains healthy by sleeping enough and eating/drinking well
- Pain medication – ask for a PRN if available

### RECOGNIZING PAIN

- People with developmental disabilities may not have the ability to describe what they feel and may use non-verbal language to express their discomfort
- The person may not be able to describe the difference between physical pain, emotional pain and situation where he/she anticipates pain

#### In order to identify pain

- Have a good understanding of the person's normal behaviour
- Discuss response to pain with familiar caregivers
- Document this information for all caregivers

#### Responding to Changes in Behaviours

- Consider pain as a possible cause
- Be aware of anything that might be causing the person pain
- Compare your observations to the description of pain behaviour
- Do not rule out pain just because the person is not behaving how you would expect someone in pain to be

#### If You Suspect Pain

- Provide comfort to relieve pain (change position; consider asking for pain medication etc.)
- Observe behaviour and report any changes