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, increased disability.

COMMON CAUSES OF PAIN IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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

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.