



**POST INTENSIVE CARE SYNDROME
IN PAEDIATRICS**

PICOLO NETWORK

Post Intensive Care Syndrome in Paediatrics

PICS-p

What is PICS-p?

Being treated in the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) can be physically and emotionally difficult for children and families. Some children may recover from their illness or injury, and their treatment in PICU, with little or no developmental impact. Others may struggle with physical, social, emotional, and/or cognitive (or 'thinking') skills and development after an admission to PICU. These problems have been described as Post-Intensive Care Syndrome in paediatrics (PICS-p).

Childhood and adolescence are important times of brain development, and children who are experiencing such problems without receiving support may have ongoing problems in their schooling, friendships, mental health, family functioning and quality of life.

The PICS-p framework also recognises that parents, siblings and other family members, too, can experience emotional and social health issues after a child has been admitted to PICU. The way different members of the family are feeling, including the child, can all impact on the child's long-term recovery and quality of life.

How common is PICS-p?

It is difficult to know how many children will experience problems with physical, social, emotional and cognitive health after PICU. PICU patients are all different. Patients range in age from infants to adolescents, some children have a one-off injury, others have complex, long-term health challenges. Some children experience difficulties in these areas before they are admitted to PICU.

Researchers suggest that 30% of children might show some new difficulties after being admitted to PICU. It is important to note that some of these problems are common and normal after a medical trauma, and might go away on their own in a couple of weeks. If they persist and are having a large impact on your child, however, it is important to notice and seek help.





What to be aware of

Your child might show physical, emotional, cognitive and/or social problems after leaving PICU. These could include:

- Headaches and pain
- Tiredness (fatigue)
- Sleep problems
- Anxiety and distress
- Medical fears
- Trouble remembering things
- Difficulty concentrating
- Behavioural problems
- Changes in friendships
- Depression
- Lower self-esteem
- Trouble settling into school
- Issues with muscle tone, weakness and coordination

These problems occur in children of all ages, including young children under the age of 6 years. However, due to developmental differences, young children might express anxiety, distress, depression, behavioural changes, medical fears, concentration and attentional difficulties differently to older children.

***Be aware of changes in
behaviour, irritability and
nightmares.***

Signs to look out for

Young children might:

- Act more clingy, whingy, and fussy
- Act irritable, seek attention or act aggressive
- Have intense temper tantrums
- Have increased nightmares (may not remember what the nightmares are about and/or nightmares might appear unrelated to being in PICU)
- Develop new fears (e.g. monsters, animals, the dark)
- Act younger, or stop doing things they used to be able to do (e.g. wet their pants; say fewer words, more dependent on caregivers)
- Complain of stomach aches or headaches
- Act out their experiences or fears in play (with dolls, teddies and/or other children)
- Talk about hospital or PICU a lot

What you can do

- Keep an eye out for symptoms of PICS-p in your child. Seek support if you are concerned about your child.
- Look after yourself as a parent/caregiver. Children, particularly young children, are dependent on their caregivers to help them feel safe, secure, and manage their own physical feelings (eg. pain), and their emotions. It is important for both you and your child's recovery that you look after yourself. Eating healthy foods, exercising, taking some time out for yourself, talking to friends, or engaging in activities that you enjoy are all ways that you can care for yourself if you are feeling overwhelmed. Seek support for yourself (or your child's siblings) if you find that you are really struggling with your own emotions.

***Children feel safe and secure
when routines and
expectations are back to
normal.***

What you can do

- Where possible, and if appropriate for your family, try to return to your family's usual routines and expectations. Sometimes after a child is injured or unwell, parents understandably become more lenient (giving child more attention and treats, not having consequences for inappropriate behaviour, letting child stay up later etc) or more overprotective (not letting their child play with friends, always being on the lookout for danger, constantly reassuring their child). Children feel safe and secure when routines and expectations are back to normal. Or, if needed, create new daily routines that are predictable for the family.
- Find ways to connect and feel close to your child. Engage in fun family activities if possible.
- Allow your child to talk about their PICU stay, injury/illness, and fears, if they want to, and let them know that big feelings are ok. Being calm and confident shows your child that you can handle their feelings and reassures them.





Want more information?

If you are interested in learning more about post-intensive care syndrome in children, head to the PICOLO website.
www.picolo.org



The Society of Critical Care Medicine (USA) also has useful resources, including videos, which you may like to review.



Where to go for help

If you are concerned about your child after their discharge from PICU, support is available.

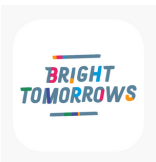
It may be helpful to consider your child's strengths and weaknesses by using the **CDC Milestones Checklists**. These can either be found on the CDC website www.cdc.gov or via downloading the CDC's Milestone Tracker App.

You may also want to explore some ideas for creating meaningful moments and tips to help build young brains by accessing the **Bright Tomorrows** information. This can either be found on the website www.brighttomorrows.org.au or via downloading the Bright Tomorrows App.



CDC Milestone Tracker App

Download free on iPhone or Android



Bright Tomorrows App

Download free on iPhone or Android

Where to go for help

You may also wish to speak to:

- Your regular GP
- Paediatrician
- Occupational therapist, (who can also help you support and access resources for your home and school environment if necessary)
- Speech pathologist,
- Psychologist
- Neuropsychologist (to assess your child's "thinking" skills like attention and concentration, memory, ability to engage in schoolwork)
- Or another specialist, to find the right pathway for your child.

You may also find it easier to get into touch with these services using with MyCHQ App (free on iPhone or android) or One Place website www.oneplace.org.au.



*Paediatric Intensive Care
Optimising Long-Term Outcomes*

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