Explaining Chronic Pain

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Explaining Chronic Pain to a Child

Explaining chronic pain to a child can be difficult. They may not understand why your pain does not dissipate like a wound that eventually heals. For conditions such as fibromyalgia and osteoarthritis, the pain does not go away; but children do not always fully understand that concept. Here are some ways to help them understand your situation:

- **Use the analogy of a doorbell.** The original trigger for pain is gone, but the doorbell (pain signal) continues to ring. It has gone haywire and will not stop. The doorbell has triggered every one of them on every house on the block. It rings day and night nonstop.
- **Chronic pain can be similar to a broken alarm clock.** It goes off in the morning and you hit the snooze button, but refuses to be turned off. You do everything you can, even unplugging it, throwing it out the window, but it continues to ring. The pain alarm in the body of a person suffering from chronic pain is similar; it does not stop.
- **Think of a car alarm.** Intended to go off if someone is trying to break into a vehicle, but sometimes the car only needs to be bumped to set it off. There are many false alarms due to sensitivity, but the alarm continues to sound. This example is similar to the sensitivity of the nervous system which gives off false pain signals continuously.

- **Glitches are a part of life.** Computers will freeze or crash, potentially erasing important information. Video games are the same; the console may need to be reset. Persistent pain can be like a computer glitch; the hardware is fine, but the software has a problem and interprets the data incorrectly, sending out the wrong information. Where our "hardware" (our bones, muscles, etc.) is fine, the "software" (nerves) sends bad information (pain) throughout our body.

It can be hard have kids understand chronic pain when they have never experienced it themselves. Using analogies helps give them an idea of why people have chronic pain, and how it "works." Children don't understand why a person with chronic pain cannot do things like participate in playing ball or going for a bike ride with them, but by explaining chronic in terms they understand, you'll help relate.