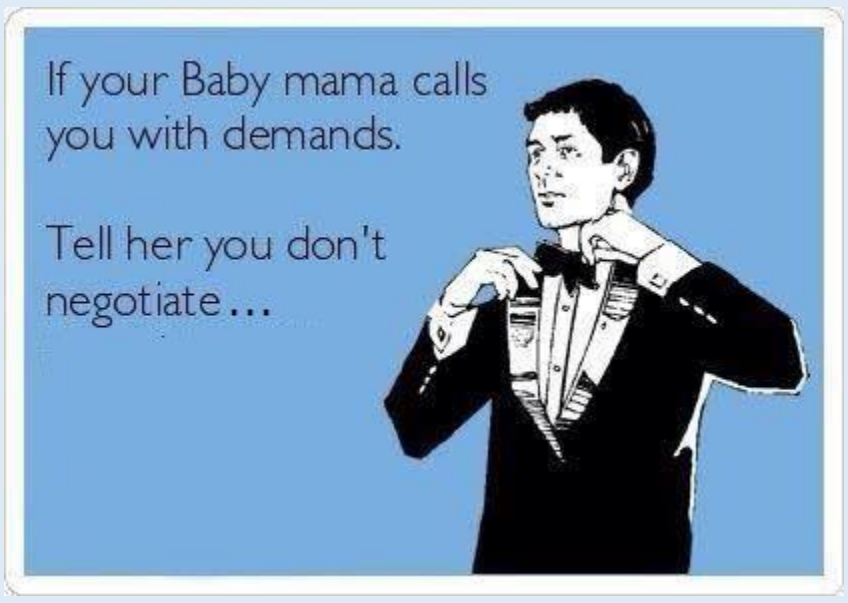
Peds Pearls

Negotiating with Kidnappers? Special Needs Children

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Doctor Mom (Or Dad…Or Caregiver…)

At a recent transport medicine conference, there was a truly great presentation on the EMS/ER management of special needs kids. Among the many valuable insights offered, one genuinely memorable gem from the presenter, Stu McVicar RRT, was brought forward by way of an unusual and thought-provoking question. That query was along the lines of, "What's the difference between a parent of a special needs child and a kidnapper?" The answer that was suggested was you can negotiate with a kidnapper! Indeed, you probably won't ever encounter a more steadfast, uncompromising, firm in their convictions individual than the parent of a special needs kid in an emergency situation. They've been there, done that, seen it all, and know what's best for their little ones. And you'd best believe them!

In the prehospital or ER worlds in which many of us live and play, a fair percentage of our "sick" kids are, honestly, not that sick. But, when you are dealing with a special needs kid who has chronic medical issues and gets sick, you take it up a notch. And that's a whole different story!

When caring for these special children and their very special parents, the tried and true approach is simply to ask Mom, Dad, or the primary caregiver if the situation has ever presented itself before. Chances are that your particular encounter is not the first. So, the logical follow-up question is to ask what was done the last time this happened. That's a great start. But don't stop there! Make sure to ask if it actually worked. No sense in repeating failures! And if you want bonus points, you can also ask the Mom (or Dad or caregiver), "What do you think we should do to fix this problem?" Ask the experts, the folks who play with, cope with, work with, care for, and pray for these special kids every day. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, "Doctor Mom's" answer is exactly correct.

Think about children with autism: An individual with an autism disorder is commonly described as being on a spectrum (having a range of symptoms) or as having different levels of severity. At one of end is a severely affected child with developmental delays who is flapping and rocking. At the other end is a child with who can be described as being "a little quirky, but very bright." With one child, ritual and routine are everything. With the other, by simply asking what the child is interested in, you will be able to create a bond with the patient who, more than likely, will be happy to share with you an amazing amount of knowledge.

Think about children with shunts: It's very possible that the parents know more about this particular shunt than you do. They tend to know when something is wrong with the shunt and they certainly know when their kid is not acting normal or at least not at their baseline. Ask those all important questions and don't assume anything.

Think about children with tracheostomies and G-tubes: There is every chance the parents are very well versed about this particular trache or that specific G-tube. You may never have seen anything quite like it before or may never have seen that particular configuration, but it probably isn't new to the caregivers. They tend to know a great deal about these devices and know when something isn't quite right with the trache and/or G-tube. Believe the parents.

Think about children with "XYZ syndrome: "XYZ syndrome" may be something so new that you have never heard of it, or it might be something that the ED physician vaguely remembers reading about 20 years ago in medical school. Chances are that the parents in front of you are the regional experts on "XYZ syndrome" and in 60 seconds or less, they will teach you what you really need to know.

So… When it comes to special needs kids, simply ask Dr. Mom or Dr. Dad, and with time and patience, chances are you will be able to learn what you need to know and negotiating will be a thing of the past.

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Contact us to have Scott DeBoer or one of our other pediatric experts present at your next conference.

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