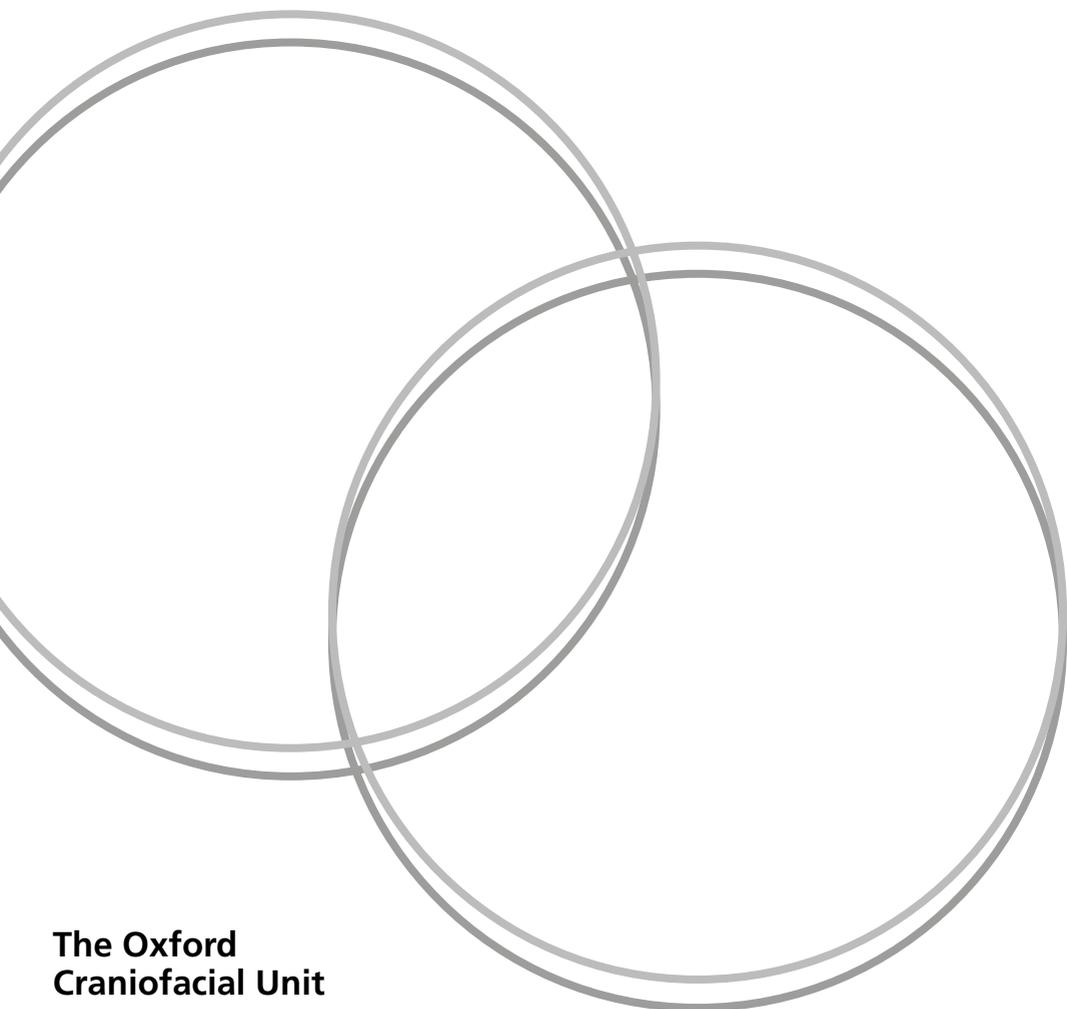




Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Questions and Staring

Guide for parents and carers



The Oxford
Craniofacial Unit

Questions and Staring

People stare and people do ask questions; we're all curious about what we see around us. Sometimes we **all** get caught out staring! Parents often worry about whether other people will stare or ask questions about their child, particularly in new situations, such as a new nursery, school or activity club. We hope these ideas help you think about how you'd like to manage if this does crop up for you or your child.

Young children are intensely curious about the world around them, and are unselfconscious about asking questions about things that are new or that they don't understand – usually in a loud voice! Reminding yourself that sometimes curiosity gets the better of all of us can make it easier to cope with questions.

We've put together some ideas that may help. You might like to practice some with a friend and test out which feel most comfortable for you. Depending on the situation, or how well you know the other person, you may need to choose different strategies.

Importantly, managing staring or questions in a calm and confident way will help your child learn how to cope with similar situations on their own in the future. You can provide an important model for your child, so they will learn to respond in a similar way to you! Here are a few strategies for you to deal with questions and staring from other children and adults.

Strategies for dealing with questions and staring

Reassurance

"It's just the way Thomas' head is, it's ok, it doesn't hurt."

"You've noticed Evie's scar – she had an operation but now she's fine."

Explanation

Explain a little bit about the condition which will stop other people's curiosity and help educate them if they come across the same thing again.

"Robert was born with a condition called synostosis. It meant that his head didn't grow properly when he was a baby. He had to have an operation but he's fine now."

Change the subject

"It's just the way Ryan's head is. He's settled really well at his new school."

"It's just a scar from an operation. Have you ever had an operation?"

Deflecting questions

If you don't feel able to give an explanation, you could try:

"Thank you, Becca is fine."

"Sorry, we're having a bad day, and can't really talk just now."

"I'd rather not answer questions at the moment."

Shake your head.

How can I help prepare my child for questions?

Very young children may notice scars or different appearance, but usually they will comment and then forget about it. Children really start noticing difference in physical appearance from around the age of 6 or 7. This can lead to lots of questions about weight, shape, height, race, physical disability, e.g. “Why is that person so...”; “Why can’t that person ...”; etc. Asking about appearance is another way of finding out about the world, and at this age is not usually designed to upset the other person, rather it is pure curiosity.

It might be useful to talk to your child about answering questions and to reassure them that other children generally only stare because they haven’t seen someone with a craniofacial condition before.

Helping your child think about ways to handle any questions that may crop up about their appearance or scars will make sure they feel confident coping with questions from their classmates. Answering questions in a calm and confident manner is also a good way of demonstrating to other children their condition is no ‘big deal’ and isn’t a potential ‘weak spot’ for bullies in the future. Bullies want a taunt that provokes a reaction from the other person, not one that triggers a calm, confident explanation or response. However, it is important to remember that questions usually start from pure curiosity, not from wanting to upset or distress.

Your child might enjoy practicing answers to questions about their craniofacial condition with good friends or siblings. It may also be helpful to let your child’s teacher know what you have decided to say about the condition, so they can reinforce this or support your child in the classroom as necessary.

Older children often find that changing schools, or joining a new club or activity provokes a new round of questions from unfamiliar children who are getting to know them. If your child has been with the same group of children for a number of years, it can be helpful to do some ‘refresher’ practice before starting a new school.

Further information and support

The internet is full of sites with ideas for children and families about dealing with questions and staring. Some of the best are:

Kidscape

www.kidscape.org.uk

Childline

www.childline.org.uk

Changing Faces

(www.changingfaces.org.uk)

Dr Jenny Cropper, Dr Samuel White and **Dr Rosanna Samuel** are the Clinical Psychologists with the Oxford Craniofacial Unit. They attend most clinics, but are always happy to be contacted via the Unit administrators to discuss the progress of your child and any concerns relating to teasing or bullying.

How to contact us

The Craniofacial Unit

Level LG1

West Wing

John Radcliffe Hospital

Oxford

OX3 9DU

Tel: **01865 231085**

<http://www.oxford-craniofacial.org/support.html>

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

Authors: Dr Louise Dalton, Consultant Clinical Psychologist
Dr Helen Care, Clinical Psychologist

Reviewed by: Dr Matthew Hotton, Dr Rosanna Samuel & Dr Samuel White

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