

needed to prevent severe contractures of the wrist, knee, or ankle in children.

Stimulation

Sensory stimulation is important in the care of the unconscious child. For a temporarily unconscious or semiconscious child, sensory stimulation helps arouse the child to the conscious state and orient the child to time and place. Auditory and tactile stimulation are especially valuable. Tactile stimulation is not appropriate for a child in whom it may elicit an undesirable response. However, for other children, tactile contact often has a relaxing and calming effect. When the child's condition permits, holding or rocking has a soothing effect and provides the body contact needed by young children.

The auditory sense is often intact in a state of coma. Hearing is the last sense to be lost and the first one to be regained; therefore, speak to the child as any other child. Conversation around the child should not include thoughtless or derogatory remarks. Soft music is often used to provide auditory stimulation. Singing the child's favorite songs or reading a favorite story is a strategy used to maintain the child's contact with a familiar world. Playing songs or favorite stories recorded in the parents' voices can provide a continuous source of familiar stimulation.

Regaining Consciousness

Awakening from a coma is a gradual process; however, sometimes children regain consciousness within a short time. Regaining orientation involves knowing person, place, and time in that order.

Certain behaviors have been observed when children awaken from the unconscious state. The stress and anxiety they appear to feel in a strange and unfamiliar environment can be expressed in silent, withdrawn behavior. Children respond to basic questioning but usually do not display their pre-hospitalization personality and social behavior until they are transferred from the critical care area.

Family Support

Helping the parents of an unconscious child cope with the situation is especially difficult. They may demonstrate all of the guilt, fear,