

are you sick?” or “What is the problem?”). It is possible that the reason for the visit is not an illness or problem.

Occasionally, it is difficult to isolate one symptom or problem as the chief complaint because the parent may identify many. In this situation, be as specific as possible when asking questions. For example, asking informants to state which *one* problem or symptom prompted them to seek help now may help them focus on the most immediate concern.

Present Illness

The history of the present illness* is a narrative of the chief complaint from its earliest onset through its progression to the present. Its four major components are the details of onset, a complete interval history, the present status, and the reason for seeking help now. The focus of the present illness is on all factors relevant to the main problem even if they have disappeared or changed during the onset, interval, and present.

Analyzing a Symptom

Because pain is often the most characteristic symptom denoting the onset of a physical problem, it is used as an example for analysis of a symptom. Assessment includes type, location, severity, duration, and influencing factors (see [Nursing Care Guidelines](#) box; see also Pain Assessment, [Chapter 5](#)).

Nursing Care Guidelines

Analyzing the Symptom: Pain

Type

Be as specific as possible. With young children, asking the parents how they know the child is in pain may help describe its type, location, and severity. For example, a parent may state, “My child must have a severe earache because she pulls at her ears, rolls her head on the floor, and screams. Nothing seems to help.” Help older children describe the “hurt” by asking them if it is sharp, throbbing, dull, or stabbing. Record whatever words they use in quotes.