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Familias, Pediatras y Adolescentes en la Red. Mejores padres, mejores hijos.

I don't know what your child has but it doesn't make me feel worried

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In paediatrician's practices, we usually face situations in which there is not an ultimate and conclusive explanation for a symptom or some symptoms.

This can make parents feel confused and worried since the lack of knowledge about what their child has, its reason and about how the situation is going to evolve. Hence, it is logical that they feel nervous and anxious.

In these situations, paediatrician's job is to assess the symptoms as explained by children or parents, know their medical history, the child's possible risk factors and perform a detailed physical examination. With these data, and basing conclusions on their professional knowledge and experience, a paediatrician will decide if an accurate diagnosis can be done and indicate thus specific treatment, if any, or if it is better to perform some extra tests or to visit a medical expert in order to clarify this situation.

However, these are not the typical solutions. It is rare that a primary attention paediatrician advises a patient to visit a hospital to confirm a diagnostic suspicion or to look for a diagnosis that they have not been able to reach in their practice. Surprisingly, they will communicate the child's parents that even though they are not sure of their child's illness, it is better to wait. The only thing that must be done is relieving symptoms and discomfort. For this reason, paediatricians do not usually refer to an accurate diagnosis. Instead, we prefer dealing with likelihood with terms such as "this could be ...", "these symptoms are typical ...", "it could be a virus ..." or "the normal thing to happen is that it just disappears with time".

Luckily, most health problems from children who have followed a comprehensible health control before being born and that have been vaccinated are unimportant and are solved spontaneously with time.

A paediatrician knows well when not to wait to see the process natural evolution and the data and the situations that make them think of the child problem, even with the lack of diagnostic accuracy, which can be a severe disease or if not taking immediate action with a correct diagnosis or an early treatment can imply a

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disadvantageous evolution or have harmful consequences for the child.

A paediatrician always decides what they think it is best for a child. If this implies tests and visiting a medical expert, they will say this immediately. But most of the times the best thing is not to perform a medical analysis since these processes' natural evolution is to be solved naturally. Furthermore, these analysis, tests and medical visits can be a disorder for families if no clear benefit is not expected from them. This can also be costly, both for health system and families themselves (days off, transport).

These uncertain moments, when a child has uncomfortable symptoms as fever, pain or vomits, make parents feel worried because they may think that they are not doing enough or that there is something important that they (or the paediatrician) have not noticed. This standby can be long in situations in which the problem solution is not immediate, as with some aspects of language or psychomotor development, recurring abdominal pain or just adult acne.

However, an important part of everyday life is waiting. Natural cycles take their time, we cannot rush anything to happen. And in this life we cannot be sure of anything. When we leave home, we never know if someone has burgled our house. When we start a car trip, we do not know the time we will reach our destination (jams, breakdowns) or even if we will reach it. When our child goes to school or on a journey, we do not know if someone will call us saying that they have had an accident.

We need to learn with everyday uncertainty apart from the existential deep one. Raising our children is, as living, being permanently at risk, but at the same time it is fascinating and marvellous. Nobody can be sure of anything, neither about their health, wellbeing, nor happiness.

Although we are aware of these difficulties, we must keep on doing our best to reach these goals, we must try to control what we can, taking into account that not everything can be controlled. We must learn to live happily with the challenge to live with the uncertainty of not having everything under control and without knowing what will happen with our child's illness or something else.

This way, we will enjoy watching our children grow without knowing what could happen with our child's health problem or with their future life.

We must not worry and, conversely, we must keep calm when we hear a paediatrician say:

"I don't know what your child has but it doesn't make me feel worried"