

Supporting Your Child During Medical Procedures

Research has shown that children who are prepared for medical procedures have less fear and anxiety. They also have better long term adjustment to medical problems. These ideas listed below can increase cooperation and help to reduce pain during and after a procedure.

Infants

- Ask to hold your infant on your lap. This may or may not be possible. It can be helpful as fear of strangers occurs between 6-15 months.
- Use a soothing voice, sing songs, and talk softly.
- Engage your infant with music or musical toys
- Use a soothing touch.
- Distract with a rattle or eye-catching object.

Toddlers

- Ask to hold your toddler on your lap. This may or may not be possible.
- Prepare your toddler for the visit no more than a day ahead of time.
- Use favorite comfort item from home (toy, blanket)
- Use distractions such as bubbles and pinwheels, musical books, cause and effect toys that have lights, music and/or vibrate.
- Explain what the medical professional is doing using words your toddler will understand and are as non-scary as possible. Focus on what the child will see, hear, taste, etc. For example “the nurse is going to clean your arm, it might feel cold.”

Pre-schoolers

- Your preschooler will do better having a person they know in the room. Ask to have your preschooler sit in your lap. It may or may not be possible.
- Prepare your preschooler three to four days before the visit.
- Read books about going to the doctor, allow your child to play doctor, and talk to them about events that will happen. Demonstrate using a doll or stuffed animal and let the preschooler practice with the toy.
- Offer your preschooler safe choices to promote a sense of control, such as “would you like to play with bubbles or cars during your test?”
- Get your preschooler involved by having them help the doctor or nurse, such as holding supplies for the nurse or opening the bandage.
- Offer choices for distraction such as bubbles and pinwheels (blowing, counting), toys that have lights, noise, vibrate, and musical books.
- Keep your ears and eyes open for fears or misunderstandings. An example of a typical pre-school age concern might be that medical procedures are punishments for bad.

School-agers

- Focus on positive behaviors and strengths and reinforce them.
- Prepare your child about a week before the visit. Be honest and allow your child the chance to ask questions and talk about their concerns
- Allow your child to choose a coping technique (deep breathing, I spy, listen to music, play on tablet or phone, stress ball, 20 questions, would you rather).
- Allow your child the choice to watch the procedure or look away.
- Support feelings/fears about procedure. Your child's behavior may not match emotions in times of stress
- Let your child know it is her or her job to hold still during the procedure or test.

Teens

- Talk about what is going to happen and allow them to be a part of decision-making.
- Prepare your teen at least a week before the visit.
- Be honest. Encourage your teen to ask the doctor or nurse any questions they may have.
- Encourage your teen to choose a coping technique (deep breathing, listening to music, watching and/or helping with the procedure, play on phone or tablet, engage in conversation about interests, stress ball, 20 questions, would you rather, I spy).
- Allow your teen the choice to watch the procedure or look away.

General Tips

- Remember your own tone and behavior can impact your child's coping.
- Be an advocate! Don't be afraid to speak up for your child's needs or ask questions about their care such as: "Could we take a break to allow her a chance to calm down?" "Could you please explain things more clearly?"
- Distraction works best when geared toward your child's individual interests.
- Change the distraction technique as anxiety or pain increases.
 - If your child continues to become upset, try decreasing stimulation by using a soft voice, comforting touch or dimming the lights.