

Let's Talk About...

Helping Your Child Cope with Medical Procedures

Your child may feel nervous about having a medical procedure. As a parent, you may feel nervous, too. Remember that you are an important member of your child's healthcare team, and you can help your child cope with stress and pain. Below are some suggestions to support your child during their medical procedure.

How do I prepare myself and my child for a procedure?

You can help your child best by learning about what's to come:

- Ask questions about what will happen, where your child will go for the procedure, how long it lasts, and what kind of equipment your child's healthcare team will use.
- Remember that you always have the right to be informed, even during emergencies.
- Decide what information to share with your child. A child life specialist, trained to support children in healthcare settings, can help.

How much information should I share with my child?

You know your child best. Think about their age and personality as you answer these questions:

- What will your child see, hear, feel, taste, or smell?
- How much does your child **need to know** and how much will they **want to know**.
- How soon should you tell your child what to expect? Some children may worry more if they have a long time to think about an upcoming event. Other children need more time and concrete examples to help them understand, ask questions, and feel prepared.

What are some ways to reassure my child?

You can help reassure your child by giving them:

- **A job.** Depending on your child's age, it may help to give them a simple "job" to do during the procedure. For example, you could say, "Your job is to hold your arm as still as you can," or "Your job is to count until the tough part is over." Have your child practice their job a few times before the procedure and remind them about it when you get to the hospital.
- **Choices.** Allowing your child to make appropriate choices will give them a greater sense of control. You could say: "Do you want to watch your favorite show or sing with Mom during the procedure?"
- **Emotional support.** Listen to your child's concerns and let them express positive or negative feelings before, during, and after a procedure. Remember that crying can be a healthy way to relieve the tension of strong emotions. Your child will feel more confident and secure if you reassure them and accept the feelings they express.
- **Comfort.** You can stay with your child during most procedures. If your child's healthcare providers have not invited you, ask if it's OK for you to be with your child during the procedure.
- **Distraction.** Distraction can ease stress and pain by helping a child focus on something besides the procedure and the situation. You can distract your child with a comfort object, like a favorite blanket or stuffed animal. Older children might like to listen to music with headphones.

Age-appropriate ways to comfort your child

For babies up to 1 year

- Talk or sing softly
- Offer a pacifier or blanket
- Play music
- Touch or massage them gently
- Dim the lights after the procedure (if possible)

For toddlers (1 to 3 years old)

- Offer a favorite toy or interesting new one
- Read a story together
- Play familiar music
- Blow bubbles or party blowers
- Gently rub your child's head or feet

For preschoolers (3 to 5 years old)

- Hold hands
- Count or say the ABCs
- Tell a story
- Blow bubbles or party blowers
- Play favorite music or sing songs
- Let your child choose whether to watch the procedure

For school-age children (6 to 12 years old)

- Give your child a toy or ball to squeeze
- Do some deep, gentle breathing
- Play favorite music
- Have your child count backwards or by twos
- Ask your child to close their eyes and think of a favorite place
- Let your child choose whether to watch the procedure

For teens (13 and older)

- Do some deep, gentle breathing
- Play favorite music through headphones
- Help your child find something funny about the situation
- Ask your child to close their eyes and think of a favorite place
- Talk about your child's friends, hobbies, or upcoming events



Sideways lap-sit

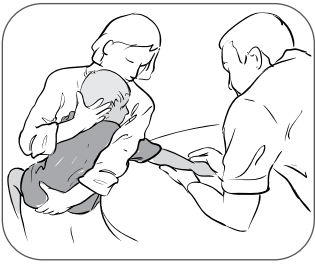
Place your child sideways on your lap. Secure your child's arms with your own. Hold your child's hand.



Stomach hug

Seat your child on the edge of the bed or exam table. Wrap your child's arms around your stomach. Hold your child's arms in place with a firm hug.

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Chest-to-chest hug

Place your child facing you on your lap. Wrap your child's legs around your waist and support their head. Your child's arm can go under your arm (as shown) or over your shoulder. Your child can turn their head toward the procedure or away from it.



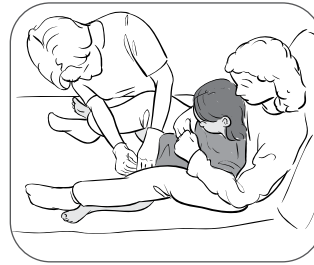
Side-by-side sitting

Sit halfway on the bed or exam table next to your seated child. Hug your child's shoulders securely. You can also hold their hand.



Shoulder hug

If the medical team needs access to your child's mouth, nose or ears, you can hold your child over your shoulder. A second staff member may need to hold your child's head during the procedure.



"Sledding" position

Place your child on your lap so that their back rests on your chest. Secure your child's arm with your own. You may also secure your child's legs by placing your legs on top of your child's ankles.



Knee-to-knee hold

Sit knee-to-knee with the medical staff person and lay your child so that their back rests on your lap. Put your child's legs around your waist and hold their hands with your own. This position lets you maintain eye contact with your child while giving the medical team access to their mouth, nose, face, and head.

What are some encouraging things to tell my child?

You can comfort your child with encouraging words—especially if you use a calm, soothing voice. The tone and familiarity of your voice can reassure your child even if they're too young to understand the words. Here are some suggestions:

- **Express confidence.** Tell your child you believe in them: "This is hard, but I know you can get through this."
- **Help your child focus.** Gently remind your child of their job, what they can do to relax, or what they can look forward to: "This will be over soon. What should we do afterward?"
- **Show your commitment.** Remind your child that you care about how they feel and that they're not alone: "I'm sorry you feel sad and worried. I'm right here with you."
- **Praise them.** If your child becomes upset and has trouble staying in control of their feelings, praise them for trying to get through a hard situation: "I know you're trying your best. We're almost done."

What should I avoid telling my child?

Avoid phrases that may pressure your child to act a certain way or feel guilty. You should also avoid saying things that suggest you're blaming, comparing, or accusing your child. This may include phrases like:

- “Your brother had this procedure, and he didn't cry.”
- “It's just a needle.”
- “If you move, we'll have to do this all over again.”

Children can easily misunderstand healthcare situations. They may think pain is punishment for something they did. Your child may feel guilt and secretly wonder if they did something to cause the pain.

How can I stay positive?

Try to end the experience on a positive note so your child can face future healthcare visits with more confidence. You can:

- Plan something special to do afterward, like playing a favorite game or doing an art project together.
- Compliment your child on what they did well: “You held your arm still and that helped a lot. You did it!” or “You can do hard things!”

Notes

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