

How can you help your child during a medical procedure, like a blood draw, vaccination or the insertion of an IV?



THE WORDS WE USE CAN EVOKE BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPECTATIONS AND FEELINGS

Words create images in our heads. For example, talking about your favorite food can make your mouth water. Research shows that talking in advance about pain, or warning about a shot, can result in an increase in anxiety and pain.

If you use helping words or positive language, you can actually help your child feel much more comfortable.

It also helps if only one person talks during the procedure. This ensures focused attention and a calm atmosphere. You can decide beforehand who will talk to your child. This can either be you, or, for example, a nurse, child life specialist or doctor.

This brochure explains how you can use positive words as a parent.

WHAT CAN YOU SAY?

"I am with you and I will help you to make sure that everything goes well".

"You will be surprised how easy it will be today because you are so busy playing your computer game".

"You have received magic cream (EMLA) so it will be even easier".

"Mum/Dad is talking to you about that nice holiday in ..., so the doctor can do his/her job well".

"Do you remember when we were on the campsite, what color tent did we have ...?"

While playing a game: "Wow, you are doing that so well" or "Come, let's go find Wally, then the doctor can do his/her job well."

What better not to say?

It's going to hurt a bit

Don't cry

Don't be such a baby

It doesn't hurt

Here comes the shot

Afterwards, focus on what went well, such as:

"Wow – you were sitting so still"

"You did that so well"

"You have made such a beautiful drawing in the meantime"

Children will remember that it was a more positive experience because they did it right. It gives them confidence for the next time. Do not apologize or criticize afterwards! Avoid:

"That was horrible for you, I know it hurts"

"You behaved like a baby"

"Big boys/girls don't cry"

WHAT YOU CAN DO DURING THE PROCEDURE:

KEEP A CALM AND POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Why?

Fear is contagious. If you are calm, your child will also be more relaxed. It is important that you stay calm before, during and after the procedure.

How do you do that?

- Stay with your child, be calm and speak in your normal and gentle voice before, during and after the procedure.
- To stay calm yourself, you could take a few slow and deep breaths before, during and after the procedure. You can also do this together with your child.
- If you think managing this will be difficult for you, discuss this with the doctor, medical provider, child life specialist or nurse in advance. They can help you.



DISTRACT YOUR CHILD

Why?

Our brains can't do everything at the same time. You are often only aware of what you are feeling when you are actually thinking about it. For example, now think of your feet in your shoes. You will feel that you are wearing shoes. But you did not consciously feel that just a few moments before. By directing your child's attention towards something other than the procedure, your child will have less fear and less pain.

How do you do that?

Distract your child before, during and after the procedure. For instance by singing together, talking about your favorite holiday/hobby/sports/game/TV program/book, or maybe by reading, blowing bubbles, playing a (search) game, toys, iPad/phone, or a topic that they are studying at school.

The more involved your child is in the distraction, the better it works. Keep your child's attention on the distraction. If you are in hospital, a child life specialist or a (pediatric) nurse may be available to help distract your child. Ask and maybe you can organize this in advance.

Some children really want to look at and follow the procedure.

Then you can say: **"This is going well, isn't it? Just breathe out, so it will go even better"**. It has been proven that breathing out makes your child more relaxed. As a result, he/she will also feel less pain and fear. Breathing in and out together, slowly, will help your child to stay more relaxed during the procedure.



WHAT CAN YOU DO AT HOME TO PREPARE FOR A PROCEDURE SUCH AS A VACCINATION OR BLOOD DRAW?

Preparation is key. Where does it take place? Who's going to do it? Is there a video about it? For example, about the hospital or about the blood draw?

- What makes your child feel comfortable?
- Does your child get to determine what happens when, or is it better if you decide this? (who is in charge?)
- Where does he/she prefer to be injected, for instance?
- Which position is best, sitting on your lap or lying down?
- Can you apply a numbing cream such as EMLA at home?
- What normally helps your child when he/she feels anxiety? Distractions like reading a story together, playing a game or a movie?
- Make a plan together with your child.

What can you say in preparation for a procedure, such as an IV, vaccination or blood test?

What will happen?

"They will give you medication to make sure you get better (or stay healthy)"



What will it feel like?

"Some children feel some pressure, others say they feel a pinch. Other children don't feel anything. I am curious what it will be like for you"

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