

Recommendations for Coping with Needles

Every child is unique and a strategy that works for one child, may not work for the other. Practice ways of coping together at home and use the ones that you find are most helpful for your child.

Reminder:

- **Be calm:** A calm presence will help with your child's anxiety, fear and pain. Children can often tell when you may be worried or nervous. A calm voice and relaxed body language will help to make a child more confident.
- **Be honest:** Tell your child the truth about what they can expect during the procedure. The more your child understands, the better chance of success. Remember to consider the age of your child and how much information is appropriate.
- **Be positive:** Praise your child! They are doing something difficult and it's important to validate that. This will build your child's trust and help them learn to cope with stress in the future.
 - Be specific with your praise – "You did a great job trying to hold still."
- **Be curious:** After a procedure, ask your child what they thought and what was helpful.

Things to Try:

- **Take deep breaths before you begin** - Breathe in through your nose, and out through your mouth, count to 3 each time.
 - When we get anxious, our muscles get tight, our heart starts racing, and we start breathing faster – which we don't want. So, taking multiple slow, deep breaths helps the body to relax and slow down.
- **Give your child a job** – Talk to them about their "job" to hold their arm still, take deep breaths, keep their brain busy through distraction, etc.
- **Use comfort positions** – this helps them feel safe, secure, and supported.
- **Create a routine** - If a regular injection is being given, create a consistent, comfortable routine (time of day, place, position of comfort, post injection fun activity such as reading a favorite book, doing an activity, picking a snack/meal).
 - If possible, try not to make the needle the last thing done before falling asleep. Mornings are even better so anxious thoughts don't build up all day.
 - Keep track of your success! This is a skill to master like riding a bike. It is something to be proud of when a positive routine has been created.
- **Involve your child in the process** – allow them to clean the injection spot, when possible pick where they want the injection to go, where they want to sit or lie down, etc.
- **Practice on a doll or puppet** - Medical play allows children to interact with medical materials in a non-threatening way and gives them control to work through their feelings, concerns, and experiences. This type of play can be very empowering as children can make choices and gain mastery over the materials.

Distraction Ideas:

Distraction is a proven way of helping with pain and distress. Distraction takes the focus away from the procedure and onto something else. Try some of the ideas below:

- **Use a stress ball** - Sometimes when we are feeling anxious, we need to remind our muscles to relax. You can do this by using a stress ball (or making a fist with your hand, scrunching your toes, etc.). This causes your muscles to become super tight and constricted. Then when you “let go” or relax your hands, it forces your body to relax all the muscles in your body.
 - It is important to relax your jaw too. You can do this by lowering your jaw a little bit, so your teeth are not touching.
- **Watch videos** - home videos on your phone or a funny YouTube video.
- **Play a game** - on a phone or tablet, or try a game of I Spy.
- **Ice it** - Hold an ice pack or ice cubes in Ziploc bag to numb the area or in your hand to distract yourself.
- **Buzzy Bee** – ask your healthcare team if this distraction tool is available in your area.
- **Listen to music** - Listening to music that you enjoy naturally relaxes and distracts our mind. It helps us focus on something not related to the task happening.
- **Ask questions** – this helps understand what is happening.
- **5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique:**
 - 5 things you can see
 - 4 things you can feel
 - 3 things you can hear
 - 2 things you can smell
 - 1 thing you can taste

Topical Options:

- Try a numbing cream on the injection site or numbing with ice.
 - Our hospital typically uses Emla or Ametop. If you are interested in this, talk to your doctor about getting it ahead of time. If you need it for bloodwork, have it put on the inside of the elbow on both sides approximately 45-60 minutes before the injection.
 - Always follow the instructions for use.
- Practice with your child beforehand. Have them try the numbing cream and the ice on different spots and poke with a toothpick to test which one they like best.