

Coping with Medical Experiences

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Whether visiting the doctor's office or having a long hospital stay, experiences with health care may be difficult or frightening. Here are some tips that you can use to help your child in these situations.

Before a procedure:

- Tell your child about a procedure or hospital visit **ahead of time**:
 - **Toddlers**: at the time of the procedure
 - **Preschoolers**: a few hours before the procedure
 - **School-age**: 1 – 3 days before the procedure
 - **Adolescents**: 1 – 2 weeks before the procedure, or as soon as you find out about it
- **Be honest**. Tell your child the truth about what they can expect during a procedure. The more they understand, the better chance of success.
- **Reassure your child**. Ensure they know that going to the doctor or hospital is not a punishment or because of something they did.
- **Medical play** is a helpful preparation tool for kids to interact with medical materials in a non-threatening way. A child life specialist can help facilitate this to better prepare your child.

- **Books** are a great tool for helping kids understand an upcoming procedure in a developmentally appropriate way.
 - Children's Family Information Library (787-7102) for more specific resources.

During a procedure:

- **Be calm**. A calm presence will help with your child's anxiety, fear and pain. A calm voice and relaxed body language will help make a child more confident.
- **Distraction** is a proven way of helping with pain and distress. Distraction takes the focus away from the procedure and onto something else.
- **Use positions of comfort**. This helps them feel safe, secure, and supported.
- **Choices**. Offering choices (when possible) can give back some control during a procedure. i.e. whose hand to hold, what kind of distraction, etc.

- **Comfort items:** Provide a comfort item such as a stuffed animal, blanket, favourite toy/book.

After a procedure:

- **Praise your child.** They are doing something difficult and it's important to validate that. For example, "You did a great job trying to hold still."
- **Be curious.** ask your child what they thought about the procedure and what they found helpful.

Age-appropriate ways to comfort your child	
Infants (Birth – 1 year)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk or sing softly • Offer a pacifier or blanket • Play music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touch or massage them gently • Light up/sound toys, rattles, blow bubbles • Caregiver present
Toddlers (1 – 3 years)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfort hold/position • Favourite object (soother, blanket, toy, etc.) • Sing or play music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Books • Videos • Blow bubbles, counting
Preschoolers (3 – 5 years)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold hands • Count or say ABCs • Praise and reassure throughout procedure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfort hold/position • Blow bubbles, blow out imaginary candles, take deep breaths • Actively involve child in treatment when possible
School-Age (6 – 12 years)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage choices when possible • Support person present • Toy or ball to squeeze • Deep, gentle breathing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play favourite music • Ask your child to close their eyes and think of their favourite place • Let your child choose whether to watch the procedure
Adolescents (12 years and older)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfortable position • Encourage involvement in care • Listen to music or play videos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive self-talk ("I can do this") • Stress ball • Slow, deep breaths