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PREPARING FOR A BLOOD TEST OR VACCINE

Information for parents and carers
to support children and young people



Division of
Clinical Psychology



NHS
Hertfordshire Community
NHS Trust



PREPARING FOR YOUR CHILD'S BLOOD TEST OR VACCINE

The child or young person you have responsibility for has been offered a vaccine or blood test. There are ways to help this go as smoothly as possible. Sometimes children and young people or even their adults can be a bit worried. This is a normal response. The following tips can help.

We have created a plan, which you can help your child or young person to complete. The purpose is to help the child be involved in decisions, and to focus on what they can change. When a child or young person knows what is happening and why, it provides a sense of control. This can help with thoughts, feelings and behaviours at the appointment and help them to have the best experience they can.

There are lots of ways you can help your child or young person to prepare for their appointment.

IT WILL REALLY HELP YOUR CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON IF YOU CAN HELP THEM TO COMPLETE THIS PLAN, A FEW DAYS BEFORE THEIR APPOINTMENT

There are lots of ways you can help them to prepare in the days before their appointment:

Tell your health professional before or at the start of the appointment

if your child or young person has fainted before during a procedure, or if they are very afraid of needles.

When calm, chat honestly about what will happen. If they are younger, show what will happen to them by using a teddy. If they are older, talk about what will happen. Go through why they need this done, mention the order that things will happen (e.g. go to clinic, see doctor, have numbing cream if wanted and if available). If you know the clinic will have numbing cream, you can let your child know about this, read any instructions about when to put this on if before the clinic, and help them to know this may 'soften' rather than remove the feeling. Speak truthfully in your own words about the sensation they will feel (like a pinch or scratch, won't take long).

Avoid saying it won't hurt, because we cannot be sure what other people will experience. Every person's experience of pain is different.

Offer choices where they are available so that the child or young person feels a sense of control, these can even be either/or choices. See plan for examples of these.

Decide who will go with them to the appointment. If you are ok with needles, your child will benefit from you being at their appointment. If you are very afraid of needles yourself, consider whether there are other safe, trusted adults who can attend instead. You might also want to get help for your own fear of needles. Whichever adult is present with the child can show them how to try to remain calm and cope with something difficult. If they have more than one adult, have your child choose which adult to bring.

Help them choose their position. Encourage them to lie down if they have fainted before. If your child feels faint during the procedure, ask them to lie down. Usually, for most people, sitting upright is helpful. Younger children may want to sit on a parent/carer's knee.

Help them choose how to get comfortable: Have them choose clothing that will be warm enough, and with a sleeve that rolls up. Bring a drink. Would they like their arm to be stroked/hand held? Can they manage to keep their arm still, or might they want help with this?

Help them choose a distraction method and bring this:
e.g. toys, books, games, bubbles, music.

Help them choose what you can do together after the appointment.

EXERCISES TO PRACTICE

Help them practice these exercises up to twice daily
(See the leaflets for your child or young person):

If your child has fainted before, practice the tense-relax exercise.

If your child is feeling very worried, practice the tummy breathing and my favourite place exercises. For tummy breathing, ensure the tummy goes out, and not just the chest. This breathing exercise will only help if these full breaths are taken.

DURING THE PROCEDURE

It is OK if they cry or shout, and the child should be told this. Stay calm, talk normally, and remind them they can handle big feelings (if they are showing these). Avoid reassuring them that it will be over soon, and instead, be really specific when distracting,

e.g. 'look at teddy/ your book/let's play i-spy/let's blow bubbles/what can we see out of the window?' Talk about their chosen loved people, pets or good memories. Talk them through the tense-relax, tummy breathing or my favourite place exercises when needed.

AUTHORS

The authors have written this document on behalf of the Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP), one of the divisions of the British Psychological Society (BPS). The DCP works closely with a number of organisations including the NHS, across disciplines, the government, and multiple professional bodies and groups in the voluntary sector, to promote and develop clinical psychology as a body of knowledge and skills.

These leaflets intend to provide a preventative resource for everyone, as well as support for those who have a needle phobia, defined as avoiding the procedure itself, (Orenius & Sailus, 2018).

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FURTHER RESOURCES

Needle Pain Management for Vaccinations & More
Skip Solution for kids in pain kidsinpain.ca

Nervous about needles? Information for families
Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children gosh.nhs.uk

Overcoming your needle phobia (fear of needles)
Guy's and St Thomas' guysandstthomas.nhs.uk

Nervous about needles?
Great Ormond Street Hospital gosh.nhs.uk



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