



Alberta Health
Services

Alberta Children's Hospital

Commitment to Comfort

CAREGIVER'S GUIDE



childkind

Vi Riddell Children's Pain & Rehabilitation Centre
Alberta Children's Hospital



ACH Commitment to Comfort

Promoting Comfort, Partnering Together, Every Time

Your health care team at Alberta Children's Hospital is committed to make sure your child is comfortable, and feels good about their hospital experiences.



HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD WHILE AT HOSPITAL

Coming to the hospital for an appointment or staying overnight can bring up many feelings for children and families. Your hospital team—made up of doctors, nurses, surgeons, pain specialists, child life specialists, social workers, and psychologists—is here to help support your family.

Here are some tips to help reduce pain, fears, or worries your child may have about being at the hospital.

Be calm: A calm presence will help with your child's anxiety, fear, and pain. Children can often tell when you're worried or nervous. A calm voice and relaxed body language will help to make a child less afraid.

Be creative: Think about what your child likes and find ways that you can bring joy and fun into the hospital room.

Be honest: Tell your child the truth about the procedure. Remind them that they're brave and you're there to support them.

Be positive: Praise your child whenever they do something well, like sitting still or cooperating. It will build your child's trust and help them learn to cope with stress in the future.

Be curious: After a procedure, ask your child what they thought and what was helpful.

Be an advocate: You know your child the best. Tell the health care team what works and doesn't work for your child.

PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR PROCEDURES



You play an important role in getting your child ready for procedures. Ask staff to explain what will happen, so you can help your child know what to expect.

Think about these questions when telling your child about medical equipment and procedures:

- **What is it?** (a stethoscope)
- **Where does it go?** (on your chest)
- **How does it feel?** (it may feel cold)
- **What is the purpose?** (so we can hear your heart beat)

Be clear and honest about the procedure. Use simple words your child understands.

When you decide to explain the procedure to your child depends on how much they can understand and how worried they are. For younger and more anxious children, preparing them the day before or that morning works best.

Some children want to know a lot about a procedure. And some children only want to know a little. Talk to your child to find out what and how much information they would like.

Check out this free app: Simply Sayin'. It helps to explain medical words and procedures to children.

A Child Life Specialist is available to help prepare and support you and your child during

MAKE A PLAN

Having a Coping Plan* helps your child feel more in control, so they have more confidence and learn coping skills. Here are some things that can be incorporated into a Coping Plan*:

Getting your child involved:

Remember, having treatment or a procedure (like blood work or an Immunization) is not a choice for them. But getting them involved when they are able in choosing the coping strategies they feel will help, can encourage interest, co-operation and confidence.



Use Distraction: Distraction (keeping your brain busy) is a proven way of helping with pain and distress. Distraction takes the focus away from the procedure and puts it on something else. Some examples of distraction for different age groups are given in the following pages.

- Please refer to the Coping Care Plan attached

Apply Numbing Cream: Your nurse can apply numbing cream on areas where the needle will enter the skin. The cream helps the skin from feeling the needle. It has been shown to reduce the pain, fear and anxiety significantly. Numbing can also be used for infants after weeks, and **breastfeeding or sucrose** solution before, during and after a distressing procedure has been shown to reduce pain and distress.

Insert new graphic here



Giving the child a job: Talk to your child about their job during the procedure. e.g. Holding their arm still, deep breathing, keeping their brain busy with distraction.

Use Comfort Positions: Having your child sit up and sometimes sit on your lap in different positions can go a long way in making your child feel more comfortable and in control. Ask your health care providers what position might be the best to comfort your child during a procedure. Some examples of comfort positions are given in the following pages.



SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD DURING A PROCEDURE

During a procedure, it helps to act as your child's coach by encouraging them to use their coping strategies.

Using positive language works very well (e.g., "You're a star!", "You are so brave")

INSTEAD OF SAYING THIS:

"It won't hurt."

BETTER TO SAY THIS:

"I don't know how this is going to feel for you, but if you use the strategies we talked about and practiced, it won't bother you."

(Don't predict the pain or how it might feel. Empower your child to be positive and take an active role in helping themselves through coping positively)

INSTEAD OF SAYING THIS:

"Don't worry!"

BETTER TO SAY THIS:

"I can see how scared you might be. Let's start doing that relaxation breathing we

practiced so that you will start to feel safer and more in control."

Use words like "can" and "do" instead of words like "don't" and "try".

Avoid words like "hurt" and "pain". Try using softer words like "uncomfortable" and "bother".

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PROMOTING COPING

POSTITONS OF COMFORT

Using a comfort position during a procedure can help your child feel more in control. They'll also feel safe and supported, have less pain, and will be more likely to cooperate with health care staff.

Children usually want their caregiver to comfort them, but they still want to feel in control. It helps if they can sit up rather than lie down. Positioning for comfort can be used as soon as the child has head control (as early as 5 months old).

On the right are photos of some comfort positions. Talk to your health care team about the best and safest position for the procedure.



PROMOTING COPING (CONTINUED)

DISTRACTION

Here are some ideas for distracting your child.

BABIES

- breastfeeding
- giving sugar (toot sweet/sucrose)
- swaddling
- rattle/shaker

TODDLERS

- comfort items
- blanket, favourite toy
- singing, music
- blowing
- sound/pop-up books



PRE-SCHOOL AND SCHOOL-AGED

- imaginary play
- talking about other things
- textured toys/squishy balls
- breathing/relaxing
- blowing pinwheels, pretend birthday candles
- using tablets/smartphones/games
- I spy books
- sound books



ADOLESCENTS

- breathing/relaxation
- using tablet/smartphone/games
- engaging conversation

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AFTER THE PROCEDURE

Talking to children after a difficult procedure helps to make their memories more positive (reframe the memories). Research has shown that this helps children cope better the next time.

HOW TO REFRAME MEMORIES OF PAIN

Be positive about the experience: Put the attention on what went well.

Focus on what helped your child: Like deep breathing, facing their fear, or holding their arm still.

Talk about the positive, helpful things they and others (caregiver and staff) did: Encourage them to talk about the helpful strategies to build their confidence. Tell them they did a great job. Help them to remember the positive coping tools and what they're going to use "next time." Tell your child you'll tell the health care team members, so they, too, will know next time.

Tell them that memory matters: The way you think about and remember painful experiences is really important. Focusing on the positive parts helps your child be less scared the next time. And being less scared helps things go better and hurt less.



RESOURCES

These resources can help you manage at home with your child.

Below are a list of books and web based resources that may further help you to manage your child's fears and worries about things that happen in the hospital.

- **A Child in Pain: How to Help, What to Do.** Leora Kuttner, Crown House Publishing, 1996, 2008.
- **You are the Boss of Your Brain. Learning How to Manage Pain During Medical Procedures. (ages 5 and up):**
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbK9FFoAcvs>
- **It Doesn't have to be this Way:**
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgBwVSYqfps&feature=youtu.be>
- **Alberta Children's Hospital Pain Rx:**
<http://fcrc.ahs.ca/rx/pain/>
- **Comfort Positioning at Children's Mercy Hospital:**
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPi3xT6UCOs&t=14s>
- **Simply Sayin':**
A free downloadable App giving simple brief explanations for medical experiences. By Phoenix Children's Child Life Department

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HEALTH LINK

Dial 811

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