



Commitment to Comfort[®]

Caregiver's Guide



Commitment to Comfort[®]

Your health care team at Alberta Children's Hospital is committed to doing our best to promote comfort by lessening pain and distress for your child during their hospital experiences.

Promoting Comfort. Partnering Together. Every time.



How to help your child at the 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, psychologists, and others—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 there whenever you can: Having a parent or special person at your child's side while staying in hospital will help your child feel more secure. Hospital volunteers can be arranged upon request.

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.

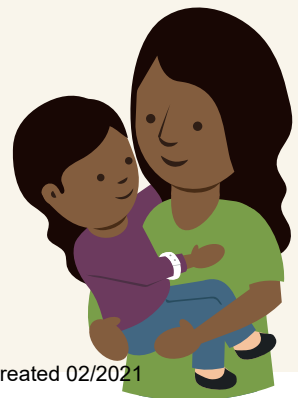
Be creative: Think about what your child likes and find ways that you can bring joy and fun into the hospital room.

Be honest: Tell your child the truth about what they can expect to happen while at the hospital. Remind them that they're brave, and that 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 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, medical treatments, or tests. First, help them to fill out their own Comfort Care Plan. Ask staff to explain what will happen, so you can help your child know what to expect. The health care team also has child life specialists who are trained to prepare your child for procedures, medical treatments, or tests.

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.



Make a plan

Having a Comfort Care Plan* helps your child feel more in control, so they have more confidence and learn coping skills. For very young children, you can fill out the Comfort Care Plan and share it with your healthcare provider. Here are some things that can be incorporated into a comfort care 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 comfort 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.

***You can create your own Comfort Care Plan using the information on the last page of this booklet.**

Apply numbing cream: Your nurse can apply numbing cream on areas where the needle will enter the skin. The cream helps your child feel the needle less. It has been shown to significantly reduce pain, fear, and anxiety. Numbing cream can also be used for infants after one month of age.



Giving your 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 sit on your lap using comfort positions can go a long way in making your child feel more comfortable and in control. Ask your healthcare 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.

Breastfeeding or using sucrose solution before, during, and after a distressing procedure has been shown to reduce pain and distress for babies up to one year of age.



Supporting your child during a procedure

Use positive language: It helps to be your child's coach by encouraging them to use their coping strategies during a procedure. For example:

Instead of saying this:

"It won't hurt."

It's 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."

It's better to say this:

"I understand that you might be feeling scared. 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."



Promoting comfort

Positions for 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 healthcare 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. An infant can be breastfed before, during, and after a medical procedure when appropriate.

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



Promoting comfort (continued)

Distraction

Distraction is a proven way of helping your child cope with painful or difficult procedures. It takes their focus away from the procedure and puts it on something else. 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 or Find It books
- books that make sounds



Adolescents

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

After the procedure

Talking to children after a procedure or test can help make their memories more positive. This is called memory reframing. 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 your child 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.

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

Below are a list of books and web-based resources that may further help you to manage your child's fears and worries about medical procedures.

A child in pain: how to help, what to do:

Leora Kuttner, Crown House Publishing, 1996, 2008.

Video: 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=UbKgFFoAcvs>

Video: 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.

Preparing your child for surgery (with video):

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/ach/Page16811.aspx>

Contact for Child Life: child.life@ahs.ca

It doesn't Have To Hurt – Proven Pain Control for Children:

<http://itdoesnthavetohurt.ca>

Video: It doesn't have to be this way:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgbWVSYqfps>

Solutions for Kids IN Pain:

<https://www.kidsinpain.ca>

My Comfort Care Plan

Please circle the things that will make you feel more comfortable during your procedure, medical treatment, or test.



Numbing cream



Counting or singing



Breathing or blowing



Look away or eyes closed



Looking / watching



iPad or DS



Special toy / comfort item



Help take off sticking covering



Sit with my special person

Things I can do:

- Keep my arm still, but I may need help with this, please
- Use my deep breathing
- Keep my brain busy with distraction

Helpful hint

Plan to do something special after the needle to recognize how brave you are.

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Health Link

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Alberta Health
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Alberta Children's Hospital



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