

How to Help a Child Who is Fearful of Needles

Needles are frequently used in healthcare to protect and treat patients. It is not uncommon for anyone, especially children, to be afraid or anxious of needles. Needles may represent pain, and the fear of pain can make the experience challenging. Here are some tips you can use to help a child who is anxious or fearful of needles and create a positive experience.

What is a blood draw?

A blood draw, or venipuncture, is the insertion of a sterile needle into a vein to collect a blood sample from your child for certain tests. The most common body site for a blood draw is the inside of the elbow.

Before your child's appointment:

- **Hydrate:** Have your child drink plenty of water before their appointment, if they are able. Being hydrated makes it easier to see and feel the veins that carry blood throughout the body.
- **Dress warm:** When a child's body is warm, it often makes their veins easier to see. Have your child wear a shirt with sleeves that are easy to push or roll up their arm.
- **Use numbing cream:** An over the counter 4% lidocaine numbing cream can be purchased at most pharmacies. Thoroughly read the directions included with the cream before applying it to your child's arm. Numbing cream absorbs into the skin to reduce the pain of the needle but your child may still feel pressure or pushing of the needle.
- **Be honest:** Let your child know they will be getting a blood draw and that they may feel a small pinch.
- **Be positive:** Remind your child that getting a blood draw is needed to make sure they are healthy.
- **Validate feelings:** Validate your child's feelings and empathize with their fears.
- **Role play:** Practice giving each other, or their favorite toy, a pretend blood draw at home. Toy doctor kits are great for this. This will help your child be prepared for what to expect.
- **Prepare:** Practice calming techniques and think about what distraction methods might work best for your child.

Calming techniques and distraction methods:

Below are some calming techniques and distraction methods that may help ease your child's anxiety. We recommend practicing these at home and planning ahead for your child's appointment.



DEEP BREATHING

Work with your child on deep breathing exercises to help calm them



TOY, STUFFED ANIMAL, OR TABLET

Bring a favorite toy, stuffed animal, or electronic device to the appointment to help distract your child



SINGING OR COUNTING

Sing a song, say the ABCs, or count with your child during the procedure



DISTRACTION CARDS

Cards can be purchased to help your child focus on answering questions about shapes, colors, or animals and not on the procedure

At your child's appointment:

Be prepared to use one or two of the above calming or distracting techniques at your child's visit. Your child may prefer to look away during the procedure, while others may want to watch and know what is happening. If your child prefers to watch and learn, let the medical assistant or nurse know and they will verbally help guide your child through the procedure. Some additional tips for your child's visit include:

- Share any past negative blood draw experiences with the medical assistant or nurse
- Help hold your child in a safe position for the blood draw to occur
- Have your child sit on your lap
- Encourage your child to take slow, deep breaths
- Help distract and comfort your child