

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.

Before your child's appointment:

- **Be honest:** Let your child know they will be getting a shot and that they may feel a small pinch.
- **Be positive:** Remind your child that getting a vaccine helps keeps everyone 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 shot at home. Toy doctor kits are great for this. This will help your child be more 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



VIBRATION & COOLING PACK

Specific devices can be purchased that vibrate and cool a child's arm, which may help reduce pain from shots



BREASTFEEDING

Babies may be soothed by being breastfed while receiving a vaccine



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:

- Encourage your child to take slow, deep breaths
- Have your child hold your hand
- Have your child sit on your lap