

Supporting Children who are Anxious about Immunization For Parents and Teachers

Preparing children for procedures decreases anxiety, promotes cooperation, supports their coping skills and teaches new coping skills. It also facilitates a sense of mastery when experiencing a potentially stressful event. Routine immunization is an almost universal experience for children and the most common painful procedure of childhood.

What Parents and Teachers can do?

★ Provide positive comments about immunization such as... “This will help you stay healthy”

Use non-threatening words such as ... “immunization”. Avoid words like shot, bee sting, and pain

Use language that is appropriate for age and developmental skill of the child. Explain scientific medical terminology

★ Try not to judge or pity the child for feeling afraid

Stress how important immunization is but do not apologize

Be honest... “It may hurt a bit but I believe you can handle it”. Do not give false reassurance.... “This won’t hurt”

Express faith in the child’s ability to cope

★ Tell them what is expected. Discuss the number of vaccines to be administered. Inform them where the injections will be given... “in the upper arm, in the muscle just under the shoulder”. Let them know it will only take a few seconds.

Allow time for questions

★ Remain firm calm and kind. A calm parent usually has a calming effect on their child. Please do not bribe or negotiate with the child; instead encourage the child’s efforts.

Adults who tell jokes or talk about things other than vaccination may reduce distress

★ Encourage the child to have positive thoughts. Suggest and practice ways of maintaining control: deep breathing, distraction, and relaxation.

Deep Breathing

Breathing techniques are a good distraction. When a child is concentrating on deep breathing with a pattern they are not paying attention to the immunization. This also stretches the muscles and releases tension.

- ★ **Help children calm down by teaching them to take a few deep breaths**
Ask them to sit quietly and close their eyes. Ask them to imagine they have a balloon on their belly button. Place their hand over their belly button. Tell them to breathe in slowly and imagine the balloon filling with air. You count to four while they do this. After four they can breathe out slowly – letting the air out of the balloon. Repeat breathing in and out slowly five times. With practice they will be able to do this on their own. It will help them relax and stay calm.

How to Help Kids Handle Stress more information at:

https://psychologyfoundation.org/Public/Public/Programs/Kids_Have_Stress_Too/Kids_Have_Stress_Too.aspx

- ★ <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/Pages/healthvideoplayer.aspx#>
Click on Mental Health, then Relaxation Exercise: Deep Breathing (1.49 min. video)

Distraction

Distraction can help to decrease stress and prevent pain during immunization. Distraction techniques that use the child's actions and senses are best. The child's attention is not on the pain when they are concentrating on something else. Distraction lowers the pain response.

- ★ **Some simple distractions include wiggling the toes, counting forward and backward, saying the alphabet forward and backward. The child could bring a book to read or an electronic game. Talk about a variety of distractions, help the child choose what they would like to do and practice.**

Relaxing

- ★ **1. Stand up. 2. Take a deep breath as if you are breathing through the bottom of your feet. 3. Breathe up through your body. 4. Lift your hands and breathe out as if through your finger tips. 5. Breathe this way as least three times.**

Government of Alberta, Education, Just Relax (student tip sheet)

Take a One Minute Vacation

- ★ **1. Imagine a place where you felt relaxed and happy. 2. Recall what it was like to be in that place (what did it look like, smell like, sound like, feel like)? 3. Imagine yourself there doing something relaxing. 4. Return to the present, bringing that warm feeling.**

Government of Alberta, Education, Just Relax (student tip sheet)

- ★ <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/Pages/healthvideoplayer.aspx#>
Click on Mental Health, then Relaxation Exercise: Guided Imagery (2.38 min. video)

If a child cannot calm down, acknowledge the effort and explain that it may be necessary to re-schedule a vaccination appointment