

Helping Your Child at the Doctor's Office



The best thing to do for children while at the doctor's office is to be a calm presence with them. Talk to them, play with them, cuddle them, and let them know you are staying with them.

Explain

It is important to explain to children why they are at the doctor's office and that doctors and nurses are helpers. Explain, even to young children who are not talking yet, about the doctors visit. Some examples of what to say include:

- We came to the doctor's office today because you have a (*insert reason - fever*). The doctors and nurses will check your body to see how they can help you feel better and get healthy.
- We came to the doctors office today for a well check. It is time for the doctor and nurses to check your body.
- The doctor will check your body by seeing how big and tall you are, look at your ears, eyes, nose, and mouth, listen to your heart, lungs, and stomach, and check your arms and legs. For younger children you can touch or point to their body part as you say them to help them understand. Sometimes doctors need to examine the genital area. If this is the case, let your child know this by saying sometimes doctors need to look at the skin on your private area where your underwear go (or the terms you use for this area of the body). Let them know this is okay because you are with them and you are at the doctor's office together.

Avoid telling scary stories or making threats about pokes. It is important that children understand that their illness and coming to the doctor does not mean they did anything wrong; sometimes people get sick and need help getting healthy again.

If your child asks if they are going to get an injection/shot/poke or have to have labs drawn, be honest in your answer. If you don't know, it is ok to say, "I don't know." Explain why sometimes pokes are necessary, such as to take care of our body, help us get healthy, help us feel better, or keep us from getting sick as is the case with immunizations.

If you want or need assistance supporting your child, our Child Life Specialist can be reached at 325-481-6198.

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on Supporting Your Child
in the Hospital



Source: University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital

Helping Your Child at the Doctor's Office (cont.)

If they don't ask about receiving a poke, it may be best not to tell them until immediately before the poke. You can say things such as, "sometimes we have to get pokes to help our body get well when it is sick or to keep our bodies from getting sick." Let them know the things we are doing to make getting pokes easier, such as:

- The smallest poke is used and the nurse will do it as fast as he/she can so the hurt will not last long.
- Let them know they can help their body by being still and taking big breaths. Show them and practice together.
- Talk about what you two can do together while the nurse does the poke such as pretend to be a statue holding each other, deep breaths, watch a video or play a game on your phone/tablet, hold hands, hold their comfort item, sing a favorite song, or squeeze a squeeze ball. See QR code below for tips.

Utilize strategies that help pokes hurt less such as breastfeeding and/or sucrose solution for infants. Lidocaine cream is appropriate for all children over 2 months of age. Cold Spray, Buzzy Bee, and/or shot blocker for children over 4 years of age. For more information, please refer to our "Reducing Pain During Needle Procedures" handout.

**Some children like to look at what is being done to them and this does not upset them. If that is the case, do not force distraction or looking away.*

Comfort Positions

Hold your child in your lap or sit next to your older child, especially if they are receiving a poke.

This is also good to do during physical exams.

Let your child see, feel, and hear your calm voice.

Comfort them if they become upset. Infants who are well established at breastfeeding may breastfeed during or after pokes.

Gently hold your young child's hands and keep them busy so they do not grab the poke or into the poke area. This is a natural response, however the child should remain snug in your arms and their hands should remain away from the poke area during the pokes. Staff will assist you with positioning.

Comfort them if they become upset. Validate their feelings with statements such as, "I hear you are upset, I am here with you," then hold and cuddle them to reassure them it is over when finished.



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