

## Reducing your child's discomfort during procedures

Most children in hospital need to have at least one procedure during their stay. Procedures are tests that are needed to diagnose, measure, or treat problems or illness. Sometimes your child might feel anxious or scared during a procedure. Hospital staff will always try to reduce your child's anxiety and pain to make your child as comfortable as possible during the procedure.

### How can I help my child?

As a parent, you know your child best, so you can also help your child cope during the procedure. Here are some simple things you can do to help your child.

#### Before the procedure (Preparation)

- Give your child simple and honest information. A good guide is to answer the five W's ... Who, What, Where, When, Why? (e.g. Dr X will be doing Y in the outpatient department tomorrow afternoon to fix your arm).
- Some apps and websites help to explain medical procedures in a child-friendly way, which may help your child. These include apps 'Okee', 'Simply Sayin' or the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) website 'Be Positive'.
- It is important to let children ask any questions they have, and to ask our hospital staff if there are questions you cannot answer. Be guided by how much or how little your child wishes to know. Every child is different.
- Stay calm. This will help your child stay calm. If you are anxious or upset your child may react with similar feelings.
- Distraction involves helping your child to focus on things other than the procedure and helps to reduce pain or anxiety. Talk to your child about distraction strategies they could use to help them cope. A good strategy is one that easily and effectively gains your child's attention. Here are some suggestions:
  - **Children under 12 months old:** breastfeeding or sucking a dummy, singing, stroking their face or gentle patting, rattles and squeaky toys, comfort objects such as blanket, and keeping them wrapped may help.
  - **Preschool age and younger:** sensory toys (i.e. squishy balls, fidget toys), bubbles, favourite book, favourite toy, singing familiar songs, light up toys, toys and books that make noise or have buttons to push, apps such as Lego Duplo, World of Peppa Pig, Play School Play Time or ABC Kids.
  - **Primary school age:** 'Spot It' game or 'Find It' book, sensory toys, bubbles, counting games, game on device, apps such as Fruit Ninja, Super Mario Run or their favourite app.
  - **Adolescents:** talk about something unrelated to the procedure such as their favourite sports or music, listen to music, play a game on a device, meditation and/or controlled breathing.
  - **Children with additional needs:** sensory toys, bubbles, familiar songs, books, toys, play a game or watch a favourite show on a device.

### Before the procedure (Positioning)

- Please talk to our staff about the right position for the procedure and the best way to support your child. This may include having your child on your lap, swaddling or supporting them to lie comfortably with you.

### During the procedure

- We encourage parents and caregivers to stay during procedures. Please let hospital staff know if you feel this will be hard for you.
- Talk to your child calmly. Show that you have confidence in the hospital staff.
- Remind your child to use the distraction methods you talked about earlier.
- To ensure your child remains distracted, avoid making any comments about the procedure whilst it is taking place. Well-meaning comments, such as “nearly finished”, or “you’re being so brave” may remind them of what is happening and increase their stress.
- Some children like having their hand held or their hair stroked.

### After the procedure and going home

- Stay with your child until they are calm.
- Praise your child for their effort to help the hospital staff help them. Focusing on the positive aspects of their behaviour helps to encourage these behaviours in the future.
- It is useful to ask your child what helped them during the procedure. This can help you plan distraction methods for any future procedures. Hospital staff can be asked to note this in your child’s record.
- Make sure you ask the hospital staff any questions you or your child have before going home.

## Child Life Therapy

At Monash Children’s Hospital we have a team of Child Life Therapists. Child Life Therapists are specifically trained people who help children manage stress and anxiety that they may feel when coming to hospital for surgery, an appointment, or in an emergency. Child Life Therapists help young people and families understand their hospital treatment and help to prepare your child by developing coping strategies with you and your child.

Child Life Therapists are currently only available onsite at Monash Children’s Hospital Clayton. They can offer preparation support to patients and their families to all sites over the phone on the number below.

## Medicines that lessen your child’s pain or anxiety

If your child is in pain or feeling very anxious, the doctors might give them medicine to lessen the pain and help them feel calm during the procedure.

Medicines commonly used include:

- **EMLA®/AnGel® Cream.** These are numbing creams that are put on your child’s skin to lessen the pain of a needle if they need a drip or injection. This is put on 30-60 minutes before the procedure.
- **Pain relief medicines.** Sometimes certain procedures like fixing broken bones or dressing changes can be painful. Before these procedures, your child will be given pain relief medicines like paracetamol and ibuprofen to lessen their pain. For more painful procedures

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they might be given stronger medicines. These might be given as a spray up your child's nose.

- **Sucrose solution.** During procedures babies can be given sucrose solution which is a sweet mixture given orally that lessens pain. Sucking gives babies comfort, so it helps to give sucrose with a dummy or finger. Sucrose can give short term pain relief and comfort for babies up to 18 months old, however it tends to work more effectively for younger babies.
- **Sedative.** Sedation medicine is given to children to help them feel sleepy or calm and stay still. Some medicines can be breathed in while other medicines are swallowed, sprayed up their nose or injected into a muscle or vein. Some children will not remember the procedure when they have sedation.

Using medicines is **not always possible** for children having procedures. For very sick children, it is important that some procedures are done as quickly as possible. Your doctor will speak to you about medicine options if they can be used safely.

### For information

- Speak to your doctor, pharmacist, or maternal and child health nurse
- Questions about how to best prepare your child for a procedure call Child Life Therapy service on **0481 904 461**
- See our information sheet: *Pain relief for children*
- See our information sheet: *Sedation – procedural sedation for children.*