

# How to Support your Child During a Medical Visit

Studies have shown that children's fear and anxiety related to medical experiences are decreased when they have been prepared for what to expect. Koller, D. (n.d.) Preparing children and adolescents for medical procedures, (47-52). Preparation allows a child to gain mastery and control, express their thoughts and feelings, clear up misconceptions, feel validated and create a successful coping plan.

## This occurs when you..

- Receive honest information
- Build a trusting rapport with medical professional
- Have parental support and involvement
- Explore and play with medical materials
- Are educated about procedures
- Have coping plans
- Are praised for their efforts

## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Call your doctor prior to your child's wellness visit to gather information on what will occur.

Are they due for any  
vaccinations?

Will there be a  
vision/hearing screening?

Will a urine sample be  
required?

## AT HOME PREPARATIONS

After you have gathered the information, you can then begin to prepare your child at home. Using a medical play doctor kit, add real materials that your child may see at their visit (gloves, bandages, gauze, tape, syringes, cotton balls). Give your child time to explore and play with lots of opportunities to lead and make choices. They can decide what role they want to have (doctor, nurse, patient, parent), where and how to use the medical materials and how long to play for. After they have played and explored for a bit, you can teach them what will occur at their upcoming appointment. Be mindful of giving them as many choices as possible.

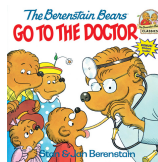
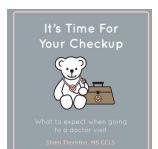
"During the exam do you want to sit on my lap or by yourself?" "Do you want to watch what the doctor is doing or look away?"

### Empower them through validation

"Going to the doctor can be scary, but I will be there to help you through it." "Needles do hurt. You can squeeze my hand or take deep breaths to help"

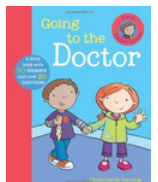
## Recommended reading:

It's Time For Your Checkup: What to Expect When Going to a Doctors Visit  
Shani Thornton



The Berenstain Bears:  
Go To the Doctor  
Stan and Jan Berenstain

Going to the Doctor  
Parragon Books



Taking Your Child to The Doctor or  
The Hospital  
Patricia Weiner

## Birth to 1 Year

### Common Concerns:

- Separation from caregiver
- Loss/change of routine
- Multiple strangers/different caregivers
- Unfamiliar environments - sights sounds, smells



### Ways to Cope:

- Caregiver presence
- Maintain routine as much as possible
- Comfort holding
- Call baby by name
- Having a comfort item from home
- Soothing music/sounds

### Common Concerns:

- Magical thinking
- Egocentrism
- Mutilation, body change, punishment
- Feels that hospitalization is punishment



## 1 - 3 Years Old

### Ways to Cope:

- Encourage independence & curiosity
- Explain events
- Offer choices when possible

## 5 - 10 Years Old

### Common Concerns:

- Loss of control, privacy, & sense of mastery
- Being away from school/peers
- Feels like punishment
- Needles, Shots & Pain



### Ways to Cope:

- Encourage self-esteem building
- Encourage socializing
- Emphasize that nothing is wrong
- Prepare & explain upcoming treatments
- Provide opportunities for practicing coping plans

### Common Concerns:

- Loss of control, privacy, & sense of mastery
- Fear of change to physical appearance
- Separation from peers
- Concerns over others opinions
- Fear of unknown
- Waking up during surgery



## 12 - 18 Years Old

### Ways to Cope:

- Provide opportunities to control the decision making process
- Encourage communication/questions
- Advocate for privacy
- Encourage socialization
- Be honest

## Parental Tips

When you are going to the hospital with your sick or injured child, you still play a valuable role in helping them cope with this unexpected visit. One of the most important things to keep in mind is to stay calm. Children will pick up on any uneasy feelings and anxiety from parents. It may be helpful if you can have an additional adult as support.

## Advocate & Communicate

There may be many medical providers that you will encounter. Providing them with a past history of your child's medical experience can help. Has your child ever had an emergency visit before? Was it traumatic? What types of strategies helped; sitting on your lap, playing with a toy/electronic device, having the steps to the procedure explained?

Remind yourself that you are part of your child's healthcare team. You know your child better than anybody. You know their likes/dislikes, things that comfort them, their personality and so much more. Share this information with the medical providers so they can build a rapport with your child and help them feel safe.



## Create a Go-Bag

We recommend creating a go bag full of essential for emergency visits.

Items to include:

- Comfort items
- Extra clothes
- Phone charger
- Small toys/portable games
- Current medical record