



Doctor Office Visit Children Aged 3-5



Background

Many children feel nervous about a visit to the doctor's office. Being prepared for your appointment can lead to a more positive experience which sets the stage for future healthcare visits.

Common fears for children are that they will be separated from their caregiver, will be in an unfamiliar place, will receive a shot/needle or that they will be given bad news. Each child is different so explore with your child what he/she is imagining might happen at the doctor's office.

How to Help Your Child

Research has shown that the following tips can improve your child's experience at his/her healthcare visit.

Explain what to expect

Children are calmer and more confident if they know what to expect. Explain the appointment to your child 1-2 days prior to the visit. Be honest. Don't make promises that you can't keep.

- Don't promise that a shot won't hurt. Let your child know what to expect and that you will be there with him/her. Watch this 2 minute video to help with shots [It Doesn't Have to Hurt](#)

Offer choices

Anxiety can come from feeling powerless in an unfamiliar environment.

Offer your child choices to give him/her a sense of control

- "You need to have your height and weight measured. Do you want to do your height or weight first?"
- "Where would you like to sit in the waiting room?"
- "What would you like to wear to the doctor's office?"



Learn through play

Familiarize your child with a visit to the doctor's office through play

- Read books about going to the doctor's office. [Children's books on healthcare visits](#)
- Through fun role play, encourage your child to be the doctor and help "cure" you or his/her teddy bear of all your unusual and funny health complaints
- Practice taking your child's height and weight beforehand so this process will feel more familiar when it is done at the doctor's office. He/she can check his/her teddy bear's height and weight too!
- Watch a video about going to the doctor's office [Sesame Street: Elmo Visits The Doctor](#)





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Stay Calm

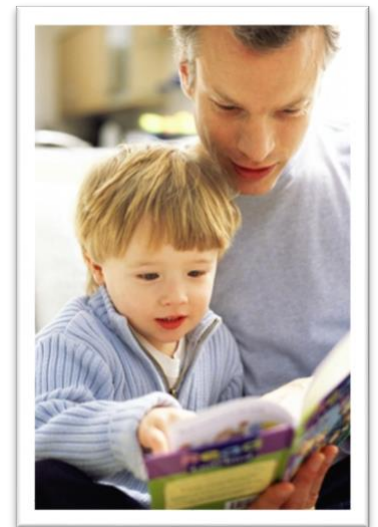
Your child looks to you for comfort and can pick up quickly on your mood. Staying relaxed can help your child also feel relaxed. Watch a 2 minute [Video on mindfulness](#)

- Let your child know it is ok to be nervous
- Have him/her sit on your lap. This is a soothing place for children.

Offer distraction

Help take your child's mind off the visit. Distraction can be a powerful tool.

- Bring your child's favorite teddy bear with them
- Play "I Spy" in the waiting room or read a book
- Bring his/her favorite healthy snack, in case it is a long wait
- Sing his/her favorite song together during uncomfortable situations, for example while blood pressure is being taken or his/her stomach is being examined



Validate emotions

Be respectful of your child's emotions.

- Praise your child for being brave
- If tears surface, reassure your child. Express your confidence in his/her ability to cope
- Refrain from saying "big kids — or boys — don't cry." This statement can produce guilt, instead of courage and confidence
- Avoid saying, "There isn't anything to cry about"
- Learn more about [How To Help A Child Understand And Cope With Their Emotions](#)

Resources

More resources on how to make the most out of your doctor's appointment

- [Canadian Pediatric Society-How to make the most out of your doctor's appointment](#)
- [Kids Health-Preparing your child for visits to the doctor](#)
- [Children's Hospital of Philadelphia-Prepare your child for a visit to the doctor](#)

More resources for how to help with needle fears

- [Watch a video It doesn't have to hurt \(2 minutes\)](#)
- [TREKK How to help with needle pain](#)
- [Child encyclopedia-vaccines](#)
- [Watch a video Sid the Science Kid Gets a Shot \(28 minutes\)](#)
- [Help Eliminate Pain](#)

