



Fear of needles in children

Anyone can have a fear of needles. Some people develop a fear because of a previous bad experience, and others may have heard bad things from other people, or perhaps do not fully understand what happens.

It can be worrying for parents if their child has a fear of needles, particularly if the child requires regular injections or blood tests, but there are always ways to improve this.

Understanding

Does your child understand what is involved in the procedure? Sometimes, children have the wrong idea about what is involved, which scares them even more. Telling the child exactly what happens may help to reduce this fear. You could explain the process by using a doll or a teddy. A children's doctors' kit may also be beneficial.

You know your child best, so you can tailor the information to their needs and level of understanding, but make sure you are being truthful.

What you tell your child can also depend on their understanding. For younger children, it may be more beneficial to explain to them just before the procedure.

It is important to reassure your child that you will be there with them throughout the procedure if this is true.

Try and stay calm too, if your child sees that you are worried, they too will worry and become scared



Think about previous experiences

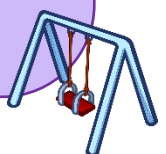
Think about how your child reacted last time when they needed a blood test or an injection. If there were problems, recall what happened. Try to remember what the environment was like, how the procedure was done. If your child was scared, try and recall what aspects were worrying for them, this can be different for everyone. If you understand why your child reacted the way they did, everyone can work together to reduce the fear for next time.



Choices

There will be times when there is no option other than having a blood test or an injection. On most occasions - there will be an element of choice, and it can be helpful to involve your child in these discussions, e.g., where to have the procedure, sitting up or lying down, or sitting on a parent's lap, what toy they will have with them, etc.

You can also try to distract your child by talking to them about what to do after the procedure, if they want to go to the park or get a drink from the shop. This will help in letting your child feel like they have had some control.



Pain relief

Pain relief is offered to children having an injection or blood test. This will be in the form of either a local anaesthetic cream or spray. These both numb the surface of the skin. They may still feel the needle going in, but it will not hurt as much. The cream is not magic, so they will still feel a bit of pressure.

The cream takes a while to make your skin numb, up to an hour, but it lasts for several hours after. The spray works straight away, but only lasts a couple seconds.



Comforting

It will be helpful for you to sit with your child during a procedure, unless you have a great fear of needles yourself. Sitting close enough to your child to give them a hug or hold their hands will give them a lot of comfort and encouragement.

Sometimes, younger children may be happier to sit on a parent's lap, as this is a 'safe' place to be. If you would prefer not to stay for the procedure yourself, please bring a friend or relative along with you, so that someone can sit with your child and comfort them.

Permission to cry

If you think your child is going to shout or cry during a procedure, that is okay, although it will help if you let the clinical staff know. It is important that your child realises that it is alright to make some noise. They will have to stay fairly still, but they can shout and cry if they want to. Talking to the person doing the procedure will help everyone understand what noise to expect next, and you can even join in if you want to. This will help to make the situation more normal and less scary for the child.

Distraction

Play specialists use this technique a lot during procedures, and you will probably do it a lot yourself. Distraction therapy aims to take the child's mind off the procedure, and then the pain and fear associated with it will reduce.

Any activity that distracts the child is worth trying, watching TV, reading a book, playing a game. Every child is different, so you might have to try a few different ideas before you find the best one.



Afterwards

Remember what worked and what did not. This can be helpful for the future. It is important to work on your child's fear of needles so it does not affect them so much in the future. If you need any help, you can talk to a play therapist or a paediatric psychologist, and they might have some suggestions for you to try!

