



Helping Children Cope with Blood Draws

We understand how stressful a blood draw can be for you and your child. This handout will provide some tips and suggestions to help with positive coping and support your child in becoming comfortable with this experience.

Prepare ahead of time: When appropriate and able, prepare your child ahead of time for their blood draw. Explain that our blood tells us about our bodies and our health. Everyone on the hospital is on the same team as you and your child. We all want to make sure he or she is healthy and safe.

Our bodies have lots of blood (and are always making more blood). A blood draw will only take a very small amount of blood to test. If your child has questions about how the blood is tested, you can explain that the blood is taken to a “lab” where they use special machines to look for certain information to make sure your child’s body is healthy.

We also have a prep book on our website, which includes pictures, steps, and sensations that can be helpful for preparing your child to get a blood draw.

Suggestions to help your child cope during a blood draw:

- **Distraction or alternative focus:** Most children benefit from being actively engaged in focusing on something else during stressful experiences. Utilizing your child’s favorite show or song may benefit their coping. This may also include deep breathing exercises or stress balls to help decrease your child’s anxiety.
- **Comfort holds:** Allowing your child to sit comfortably with you (the caregiver) will add an extra sense of safety and security. There are various comfort hold positions that you can try with your child depending on age and size. Your phlebotomist or child life specialist can help determine what might be best for your child.
- **Explanations of steps and sensations:** As the blood draw goes along, you and the phlebotomist can focus on what your child is going to experience and feel.
 - Using child friendly language, explain things like the tourniquet as a blue rubber band; and tying it as a “tight hug”.
 - You can avoid using words like “hurt” or “pain” and focus instead on feeling it as “pressure” or a “pinch.”
 - Another great way is to explain children often feel different sensations and ask your child to tell you how it feels after they’ve experienced it.
- **Give opportunities for choice and control:** Reinforce that having the blood draw is not a choice because we all care about your child’s health and wellbeing. However, there are other choices your

child can make within this experience. Allowing your child chances to make decisions and exert control in this situation can benefit your child's coping.

- For example, you can ask which caregiver they would like to sit with, what distraction they would like to engage in, or what number they would like to countdown from (between 1 and 10) prior to the poke.
- In addition, giving your child a "job" during the blood draw provides another opportunity for control. The child's job can be to sit still and hold arm very straight.
- Making sure everyone has a job establishes to your child the team aspect of this experience and your child's integral role as a part of that team.

