

Supporting your child for a blood test

If your child needs a blood test it is common for them to feel worried but there are things you can do to help. This hand out will give you ideas about how to prepare and support your child for their blood test.

Be honest

Not telling your child why they are coming to hospital can increase their anxiety for future procedures. Be honest with your child about their blood test by explaining what will happen in a way they will understand.

Age dependent explanations can include:

“We are going to hospital for a test today”

“Mummy will give you a cuddle while the nurse does a test in your arm or hand”

“You can choose if you have cream or spray so you don’t feel so much”

Instead of promising they won't feel anything, you should be honest about what your child might feel.

Age dependent explanations can include:

“The cream will reduce what you feel”

“You might feel nothing, you might feel something. Everyone is different. When your test is finished you can tell me what it was like for you”

“You might feel nothing, some pushing or a little scratch”

“The cream helps so you don’t feel so much”

“The spray will make your test feel very cold”

What not to say

For some children, blood tests are not an unpleasant experience and the language we use can increase their anxiety unnecessarily. For a lot of people, the word brave implies something bad is going to happen and can increase their anxiety. You could try giving them strategies to cope with the blood test instead.

Give Control

Giving children some control can help them to be more compliant. Where possible try giving your child choices where the end product is the same but your child is part of the process.

Ideas could include:

“While we do your test, would you like to read a story or blow bubbles?”

“Would you like to sit on mummy or daddy’s knee for your test?”

“When the test is finished, would you like to go to the park or granny’s?”

Parent/ carers role

There are lots of other things you can do to help too. Ideas include:

- Try keeping your child's hands/ arms warm and if it is not a fasting blood test, keep them well hydrated. This will make it easier to get the blood sample.
- Try distracting your child during their blood test. You could try looking at a story, play a game on a small tablet or phone, listen to music, practice relaxation and breathing techniques or talk about something they like.
- Your reaction will have a big influence on how your child responds. Try to be positive about the experience. If you have significant anxiety about blood tests or needles yourself, tell the nursing staff or ask for a play specialist who can be there to support your child.
- If your child has had a previous bad experience, think about what may have made it difficult for them. Did the cream or spray not work? If so you could ask for an alternative. Were you waiting for a long time? You could bring something for your child to do in case of long waiting times. Did your child have something to do while the test was done? If not try some distraction or play a game.

Pain relief

You will have two options for pain relief for your child:

- **Numbing spray (Recommended for 10+years).**
Numbing spray is very cold, works immediately and numbs the area for a short period of time. Cold spray can be a shock because of the temperature and can make veins smaller.
- **Numbing cream (recommended for 6months-10 years).**
Numbing cream is an effective way of numbing a small area and lasts a long period of time. There are a number of different creams, meaning if one doesn't work, there are alternatives you could try. Numbing creams has to be applied under an adhesive clear dressing for a minimum of 45 minutes. If your child doesn't like stickers, cling film can be used instead.

Positioning

How your child is positioned can also make a difference. A common position for younger children who can sit on a parent's knee is shown below.



Sit on parents/ carers knee. Hand used for test behind parent back in a "hug" position

Distraction held in front of child

For older children they may choose to sit, lie down, watch the test or look away.



If all else fails

If your child has had a previous bad experience or remains significantly worried, they may benefit from play specialist support. You can request a referral through your child's hospital consultant or specialist nurse.

Contact details

Play specialist

Telephone number: 0300 019 8383

For further general health-related information, please ask the relevant department for an information prescription or contact:

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If you wish to make any comments or to ask about any research evidence used to write this leaflet, please contact the Patient Experience team confidentially: phone 01202 448003, write to the Health Information Centre (address above), or email healthinfo@poole.nhs.uk.