

Family Education Sheet

Supporting Your School-Age Child During Needle Pain



Boston Children's Hospital
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How do school-age children react to medical procedures?

- Children ages 6–12 often have fears about needles, pain or surgery. Children this age usually have less fear when they understand what is happening.
- Your child may be starting to understand the idea of death. They may have fears about death or injury that are not based in reality and that are very scary.
- Your child may hear things at school and believe what they see on TV and online.
- It is important to understand that these fears are very real to your child. Be sure to listen seriously to their thoughts and worries.

How can I help my child understand what will happen?

- Your child may ask questions about their illness, hospitalization or procedure. They may want to know what is going to happen—when, where and why.
- Give your child clear and honest information about what they can expect.
- When you are helping your child deal with these fears it is best to use **simple** language.
- Use the word “bothers” rather than “hurts” so that you do not frighten your child or make them think something will definitely be painful.

What can I bring to help my child?

- You can bring familiar toys, books or pictures to help them feel more comfortable. Planning for supportive emails, cards and web-chats with friends can help.

How can I help during the procedure?

Things you can do

- Hold your child in your lap if they are young and hold your child’s hand.
- Rub the skin at site for about 10 seconds before a needle is given.
- Let your child cuddle with a blanket or stuffed animal.
- Have them focus on a toy or book or watch TV, sing songs or play music.
- Have them take deep breaths.
- Suggest “blowing away anything that bothers you” by:
 - Blowing out pretend candles
 - Blowing bubbles
 - Using a pinwheel

Things you can say

- “Tell me what you think is going to happen now...” Listen and explain anything that your child does not understand.
- Make sure your child knows that the treatment is **not** a punishment.
- Count together through stressful or painful moments.
- Sing the alphabet or a familiar song.
- Be funny and/or tell jokes.
- Talk about a special memory.
- Imagine a comforting place to be.
- Praise your child. For example: “You are doing a great job holding still.”
- Use guided imagery.

Sometimes a relaxation exercises can help. For example:

- **10 count:** Your child counts slowly from 10 down to 0. Say each number on the exhale. They breathe in and on the first exhale say “10.” With the next exhale, they say “9.” Work down to “0.” Repeat several times.
- **4 count:** As your child inhales, they count slowly up to 4. As they exhale, they count slowly back down to 1. As they inhale, quietly say, “1...2...3...4...” Then as they exhale, they can say, “4...3...2...1...”

Are there medications that can help with needle pain?

Yes. You can use a cream called LMX-4 to numb the skin for certain needle procedures. **You need to plan ahead when**

using the numbing cream, as you have to put it on a special way. Read our Family Education Sheet to learn more: <https://extapps.childrenshospital.org/EFPEC/Home/Sheet/1761> or scan the QR code to the right with your phone camera.

There are 3 ways you can get this numbing cream:

- **Talk to your care team about applying LMX-4.** Nurses may apply LMX-4 numbing cream during your clinic visit, before you go to the lab, or before a needle procedure in the clinic. Please keep in mind that you will be billed for the application of this cream.
- **Purchase LMX-4 at your local pharmacy.** You may want to call your pharmacy ahead of time to make sure they have it in stock.
- **Purchase LMX-4 from a reputable online retailer,** such as from Walgreens.com, Walmart.com, or CVS.com.



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