



This family education sheet explains how you can help your child if they are afraid of needles (needle phobia). The strategies below are meant to lower your child's needle phobia and support their long-term care.

Key points

- Needle phobia is common.
- There are strategies parents can use to help their child's needle phobia.
- You can get support for yourself as a parent and support your child.

Part of the care for many children with endocrine disorders is daily needle injections. If your child struggles with needle phobia, it can feel harder to manage their care. For example, we know that children with diabetes and needle phobia tend to have higher A1C levels.

What is needle phobia?

- Needle phobia is when a person has a larger-than-expected response to procedures that involve needles.
- A person may avoid care, run, scream or cry. Fear of needles may impact other areas of the child's life and/or functioning.

Why do some children have needle phobia?

- It can be uncomfortable or painful to get shots.
- They may not like the loss of control or needing to sit still.
- It can be scary to not understand what is going on.

How common is needle phobia?

You should let your child know that their fear is not unusual. About 25% of adults struggle with needle phobia and that number is likely higher in children.

How does my feelings and behavior affect my child?

Part of needle phobia in children can come from their parent's/caregivers' own thoughts, feelings and relationship to needles and what it's like for them to give so much care to their child. You may find yourself avoiding blood sugar checks or other parts of care because of your own fear of needles, or because your child struggles with injections and blood glucose checks.

These feelings and experiences are not unusual. But they're important to address because they can impact your child's well-being and care. Your attitude can

influence your child's attitude and it is important for them to see you as calm and confident when it comes to their medical care. If you think that you need help with your response to your child's needle pokes, please reach out to the Endocrine Mental Health team.

What are big-picture things I can do to help my child's needle phobia?

- Offer your child opportunities for control, so they can be more in charge of their experience, whenever possible. You could ask them where on their body they want to have their blood sugar checked, or where they would like to sit when you do a shot.
- Use clear language to describe what you are doing. For example: "I'm checking your blood sugar so we can plan your insulin for dinner."
- Practice stress-reducing techniques and model how to use them for your child. Use the stress-reducing techniques you have practiced when it's time for your child to have an injection, blood glucose check, pump site change or CGM site change.
- Make sure all of your supplies are ready and organized so you can work smoothly and quickly when it's time for an injection.
- Use books, video games on your phone or TV to distract your child during an injection or blood sugar check.

What are things that can comfort my child in the moment?

The following may help reduce some of the pain or help your child cope with pain that might make their needle phobia worse.

- A numbing cream or rubbing ice on the area may help. You can request a prescription for numbing cream from your child's healthcare provider.
- Buzzy Ice Packs provide cold and vibration to area where injection will happen.
- Shot blockers can distract kids from the pain and provides a visual block from the needle going into the skin.
- Your child may enjoy using different distraction toys during an injection or shot. You can have a small basket of these toys for them to choose from.

What doesn't help?

- Don't delay/put off the needle poke. Often, children have more anxiety before a needle poke than during or after it. Delaying a blood sugar check or insulin injection can increase anxiety in the long term. This is called "anticipatory anxiety."
- Don't spend too much time empathizing or apologizing to your child. Instead, remind them that you know they can do this and that you will support them.

How can I prepare my child for a hospital or clinic visit?

If your child has anxiety about needles when they come in for their diabetes care, please let the care team know before to your visit. Our staff can make sure to have additional tools, like distraction toys, available to you and your child.

Where can I learn more?

- This video produced by The Family Medical Coping Initiative team at Boston Children's Hospital can offers other strategies and information about needle phobia <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyAzJwpOZqZyBGWO7jSIImzg>.
- Talk with members of your child's care team. They can help you think about creative strategies to manage your child's care and address issues with needle phobia. They can also make referrals to the social work team, who can meet with your family.