

# HELPING YOUR NERVOUS CHILD WITH THEIR BLOOD WORK

## GET READY

- Discuss how avoiding this blood test is getting in the way of doing what they want to do. Are they missing school, social events or sports? Build their reasons for wanting to get the test. (For many kids, their reasons might not be health related)
- Explain the difference between willing and wanting. We understand they don't want a needle, but the goal is for them to be willing.
- Build their confidence that they can do hard things. Use examples from past successes they have had.

## PLAN AHEAD



- Buy topical numbing cream from a pharmacy. Ask them how, where and for how long to apply it.
- Offer preparation for children who cope best with information (see back).
- At BCCH, ask for a child life specialist.
- At a community lab, make an appointment.
- Make a specific plan for when you arrive (see back).
- Expect that your child will feel anxious and PRACTICE your coping strategies at home many times before you come.
- Brainstorm and write down brave thoughts to use when anxious feelings are taking over like, "This will be quick" or "I can do this."

## DAY OF THE TEST

Before bringing your child in for blood work, take a minute to assess how you feel about blood work. If you are nervous, consider asking a trusted person to bring your child. Children look to their parents to know how to cope with situations. It has been shown that children's distress during venipuncture is related to the behavior of accompanying adults ([Orenius et al. 2018](#)).

- Tell your child what to do, not what NOT to do: "Take some long deep breaths like you are sniffing a flower" or "Breathe out slowly like you are blowing bubbles."
- Bring distraction items and plan to do something fun after the test.

## HELPFUL SCRIPTS

- Notice, name and validate the emotion they are experiencing without trying to change it. Gently use the tone of your voice to repeat their words, and name their emotions to bring down the intensity. Try to speak slower and quieter than them. *"This is feeling really hard right now."*
- Use the "Press Pause" metaphor if they are asking to stop. Use a timer or a tangible limit for the pause: *"Lets press pause right now (wait a few seconds). In 3 breaths we are going to move to the next step."* Or *"When the minute hand gets to the 12, we are going to move on."*
- Model slow deep breaths for them.
- If they are starting to get overwhelmed, you can say, *"I can see how hard your mind is making this for you, but I know you really want \*insert reason they identified of why they need the test."* Then, repeat the brave thoughts you had brainstormed before coming.



## AFTER THE POKE

- Remind them what went well. Help shape their memory.
- Promote any expectancy violations: what did they expect to happen versus what did happen. Was there any new learning that can be drawn into their awareness. (ie: It didn't hurt as much as I thought it would. They were nervous but managed to get through it.)
- Build their confidence that they can do hard things.

## RESOURCES

If your child copes best with knowing what to expect, you can use this preparation book to help them understand what will happen. Fill out the needle plan to help them gain control and plan their own coping techniques.



FOR CHILDREN



FOR TEENS



NEEDLE PLAN

Child life specialists work to help patients cope with procedures. Contact [LabChildLife@cw.bc.ca](mailto:LabChildLife@cw.bc.ca) for more information on how they can help your child.  
Tel: (604) 875-2345 ext. 7687  
Website: <http://www.bcchildrens.ca/our-services/support-services/child-life#Resources>