



# Helping Your Child Cope With Radiology Procedures

CREATED BY THE RADIOLOGY CHILD LIFE SPECIALISTS AT THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OF PHILADELPHIA • PHILADELPHIA, PA

Hospitalization and medical procedures can be very stressful for children of all ages. In this guide, you will learn strategies for helping your child prepare for and cope with her Hospital experience.

## HELP YOUR CHILD PREPARE.

Research indicates that children who are prepared for a procedure or healthcare experience recover faster from the procedure and are less anxious than children who are not prepared.

You can help your child prepare by familiarizing yourself with what will happen before, during and after a test or procedure. Then you can let your child know what to expect.

It's important to remember that if you are stressed or uncertain, your child will be, too. If you are calm, your child will be more relaxed.

Tips for preparing your child:

- If your child is under the age of 5, talk to him a day or two before coming to the Hospital. If your child is older, talk to him about a week before his procedure — he should have a few days to process the information and ask questions.
- Explain in words your child will understand what he will see, feel and hear during the procedure. Be honest.
- Encourage your child to discuss his feelings and to ask you and his healthcare professionals questions about the upcoming experience. Feeling understood and listened to helps your child feel more connected. If you do not know how to answer your child's questions, tell him so — and call one of our child life specialists at 267-426-7020.
- Take your cues from your child. Many children are unable to express their feelings and anxieties verbally. Be careful not to force a discussion or overwhelm your child with information.
- Help your child pack a bag to bring to the Hospital. Encourage him to pack items that will comfort and distract him.

**We Can Help:** Radiology child life specialists are available to help your child prepare for medical procedures. We use age-appropriate language and teaching materials, including dolls, photo books and real medical equipment. For more information, call 267-426-7020.

## HELP YOUR CHILD COPE.

It is not uncommon to see changes in your child's behavior before, during or after a Hospital experience. Children's responses differ depending on their age, the procedure they are having and their past experiences. Your child will respond to your stress, so try to remain calm and attentive to her needs.

Things you can do to help your child cope:

- Speak to her in a soft, comforting voice to help her focus on you instead of the procedure.
- Give her choices. Let her decide which stuffed animal or CD to bring. Ask her how you can make things easier for her.
- Remember that it's O.K. if she cries. Crying is a natural way for children to express their feelings and anxieties.
- Try to focus on the positive. Tell your child what she is doing right during the procedure. (For example, "You are holding so still" or "Great job squeezing my hand.")
- Tell staff what works. You are the expert on your child.
- Teach your child healthy coping strategies (see next section). She'll be more confident if she feels like an active participant in her own care.

## STRATEGIES FOR CALMING YOUR CHILD

### *Touch*

Reassure your child with your touch — it helps him feel more secure.

**What to use:** A blanket, a favorite stuffed animal and your own hands.

**What to do:**

- Hold your child or sit close to his bedside.
- Stay near the head of the bed so he can see, hear and touch you.
- Gently rub his back, arm or forehead.
- Let him hug a stuffed animal or hold his favorite blanket.

### *Imagine*

Play a game of make-believe with your child — it's a good way to keep his mind off the procedure.

**What to use:** A relaxation CD, a storybook, music and your child's own imagination.

**What to do:**

- Put on a relaxation CD or play your child's favorite music.
- Ask him to think of a special place he'd like to be.
- Make up a story together. Follow your child's lead — even if his story seems silly.
- Keep your child involved in the story. Allow him to make choices and ask questions.
- Practice before you come to the Hospital. It's more difficult for your child to learn new coping skills in the middle of a procedure.

### *Distract*

Distract your child with something fun — a sparkly wand, a colorful book or a game.

**What to use:** A glitter wand, a pop-up or *I Spy* book, a kaleidoscope, music or a hand-held game.

**What to do:**

- Participate in the activity with your child.
- Make sure the item you are using will hold your child's interest.
- Let your child hold and play with the item. If this isn't possible, let her tell you what to do with the item or, if you're using a book, when to turn the page.

### *Breathe*

Taking slow, deep breaths will help your child relax.

**What to use:** Bubbles, pinwheels, kazoos, whistles or party blowers.

**What to do:**

- Practice slowly breathing in and out with your child before the procedure.
- Breathe together so that your child can hear, see and copy you.
- Let your child watch you take deep breaths — it will help her stay calm even if she chooses not to follow along.
- Blow bubbles or play with a kazoo, pinwheel or party blower.
- Make the breathing activity into a game: Count how long you can blow, or blow big bubbles instead of small ones.

Watching your child go through a medical procedure is hard for any parent. If you would rather not be in the room, a staff member can help your child cope during the procedure.

*If you have any questions about what your child will experience while he's in the Hospital, or have concerns about how he will cope with a procedure, contact the Radiology child life specialists at 267-426-7020.*

## OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

[www.chop.edu/childlife](http://www.chop.edu/childlife)

[www.chop.edu/radiology](http://www.chop.edu/radiology)

[www.kidshealthgalaxy.com](http://www.kidshealthgalaxy.com)