

Kids cope better when you engage them in play.

Children learn and express themselves through play. In the health care setting, play allows children to work through their medical experiences.

Medical Play

A Guide for families



**Texas Children's
Hospital®**

Benefits of Medical Play

Medical play allows your child to use the medical supplies in any way they choose. Once your child is done playing you can show them the correct use of medical supplies or steps to a procedure. Have your child assume the role of doctor or nurse and perform the exam on the patient. You, a doll or a stuffed animal can be the “patient.”

Medical play allows children to:

- ✓ Familiarize themselves with medical supplies
- ✓ Identify and build positive coping skills
- ✓ Build confidence as they practice their coping skills.

About Child Life

At Texas Children’s Hospital, we understand a visit to the hospital can be challenging for your child and family. Child life specialists are available to ease your child’s anxiety and help him or her feel more comfortable in the hospital. They use age-appropriate explanations to help children know what to expect while at the hospital. Child life specialists also know that the hospital can bring up different feelings for your child. Therefore, they will work with you to support your child’s emotional needs. Child life specialists also provide play opportunities to support your child’s growth and development. Please contact your child life specialist for any medical play needs or questions.

Tips and Tricks

- 1 Medical supplies (hats, gloves, bandages, etc.) can be used to help your child play.
- 2 Consider using a toy doctor kit to enhance play and exploration.
- 3 Go at your child’s pace and never force them to play with medical equipment. Make it a fun and enjoyable experience for everyone!
- 4 For safety reasons, please only use these supplies under adult supervision.

Appropriate Language

Avoid the use of “we” or “our” when you really mean “you,” “I” or “me.”

- Use “It is time for you to take your medicine.” Rather than “It is time for us to take our medicine.” Encourage children to play active roles whenever possible.
- You might say to a child, “Your job is to take deep breaths into the mask” when describing anesthesia induction.

Avoid Confusing Language

Communicate using simple concrete language that is appropriate to your child’s developmental level.

- IV = a small straw that helps give you medicine
- X-ray/CAT Scan/MRI = a large camera that takes pictures to help the doctors take a look inside your body
- Shot = a poke or pinch
- Stretcher = a bed

Caregiver’s Role During Procedures

- 1 Use the five senses to describe medical supplies. *Cold and wet for alcohol wipes, sensation of a tight squeeze when using a tourniquet.*
- 2 Discuss positive choices your child has during procedures. *Ask where your child wants to sit or if they want to count to three or not.*
- 3 Acknowledge and validate feelings. *Tell your child things like “I know this part is hard for you.”*
- 4 Explore coping skills to make medical experiences easier. *Deep breathing, holding a caregiver’s hand or using distraction items. You could sing a favorite song. You are your child’s best distraction device because you know them best!*

