

Advice for SM parents planning a medical visit for their SM child

In this case the advice is for those SM children who are having trouble handling injections and blood samples. It can be a hairy scary moment when a young child goes through such an invasive event the first time, and sometimes a repeat can be extremely stressful. I'd guess you could apply it to things like dentists too ...

I'm writing this as a parent of an SM child who continues to go through regular medical visits and at the age of 11 she has become something of a 'pin-cushion' as she calls it. Anxiety is down these days but aged 3 it would of course skyrocket. Nurses can be calm and experienced but sometimes they can be, or even have to be, rough and tough in order to take a blood sample for an important test. It's a hard thing to watch as someone goes through the agony of waiting, then the stress and even pain of the event itself. 'It's never as bad as you think' is easy to say ... especially when it's not you being pinned to a chair at the age of 3 by your loving dad while a green-clad stranger sticks needles in your arm !

Facts

- Needle phobia does exist.
- Young children do have their vaccinations usually before they are old enough to worry about them, although this is not always the case.
- Blood tests are a very necessary thing ...

The following advice, for the most part, comes from an SM mum. This particular SM mum is also a doctor. This advice comes from a professional, but is given from the heart. She gave it once, but by sharing it she can help hundreds of others.

1. You can contact the medical service in advance to explain any anxieties your child suffers with so that they can be prepared for you when you arrive.
2. A doctor in a white coat or a nurse in blue or green might be a far more scary thing to face than a special needs professional dressed in a clown suit for a few moments.
3. Playing doctors and nurses at home is fun and it will make the visit a much less stressful event once they've seen things like a stethoscope, or one of those rough wooden tongue depressors.
4. Parental stress always raises a child's anxiety level, so maybe decide which parent attends the visit, and above all, stay calm. Be firm if necessary, but stay calm.
5. If you have your own needle phobia, don't mention it ...
6. Bribery is a bad thing. But the suggestion, made after the event, of doing something funny might just do the trick and put a spark back in the step of a suffering youngster with a plaster on their forearm.
7. Ask the doctor to check the heart rate of Teddy before they check your child. Teddy is always very wise and the bravest in the family, ask Grandma, didn't you know ?
8. There are childrens books showing what to expect from a visit to a medical service. Try one*.

9. Don't lie about the visit. 'It won't hurt' isn't a great thing to say. It will be over quickly and they'll put a plaster on it afterwards, like when you hurt your knee.
10. Take younger children to an older sibling's visit, it let's them see how to react. (a kind of graded exposure)
11. Parents should always be positive. 'You'll be fine'.
12. Never demonise a doctor. 'If you don't take your medicine you'll have to go back to the doctor'. It's a simple phrase but it gives the doctor a negative connotation. Don't associate medical visits with punishment.
13. Nurses are like grandmas. They have 'magic cream' that you can put on your arm before the needle goes in. Makes things much easier.

I wish I'd had this list all those years ago ...

I'm just a dad, and she's just a doctor ...

My daughter is my hero ! I hope this helps someone ...

*There are a number of titles available through Amazon – search 'Children's Books' for titles such as 'Visit to the Doctor' or 'Visit to the Hospital' to suit your own situation.