

Caring Communication

Caring communication is about allowing your child to know they are safe and being looked after when they have a procedure. The way you communicate to your child can be very helpful in letting them know they are safe.

Verbal Communication

Keep your language positive, helpful and honest. Let your child know what is happening in a way they can understand at their age and development. It's helps to be neutral or positive and to allow your child to experience what happens without predicting that first.

When we use words that predict negative things, we tend to experience them in that negative way, but if we are neutral or positive we may find a more positive outcome.

People use negative language with the best of intentions without realising it is unhelpful. Instead, by changing to more positive language - and language to increase understanding - we can provide information about why something is being done.

Avoid apologetic, criticising, threatening or catastrophizing comments.

Examples include:

- > *'I'm sorry we have to do this'* - is **apologetic**
- > *'Don't be naughty'* is **criticising**
- > *'If you don't stay still, the doctor will give*

you 2 needles' is **threatening**

- > Positive alternatives are
- > *"The blood test will help the doctors to get you better"*
- > *"You're doing a great job, they are nearly finished"*
- > *"If you keep still, it will be finished soon"*

Avoid Negative Suggestion

'Negative' words and comments are unhelpful. Your child will tend to experience the negativity suggestion. It's better to say comments in a therapeutic way. For example:

- o *'The dressing change won't hurt too much'*
Your child will only hear *'hurt'*. Instead say:
'The nurses are putting on a clean dressing to help you get better faster'
- o *'This medicine will stop you vomiting'*
Your child will only hear *'vomit'*. Instead say:
'This will help you feel better so that you can eat your favourite burger'
- o *'There is nothing to worry about'*
Your child will only hear *'worry'*. Subconsciously you are implying there is something to worry about. Your child will start to worry.
Instead use a distraction: *What's your favourite movie...*
Or use their imagination and memory to go somewhere they enjoy or feel safe such as

dancing, or riding their bike.

- o *'You're so brave'* is best avoided

Your child who was calm is now wondering why they need to be brave and catastrophize; what is going to happen?

Instead stay focused on the importance of the procedure and its role in your child's recovery.

Non-verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication is important. When your body language and demeanour is calm, your child will feel at ease.

If you feel a procedure may be upsetting for you, you have the opportunity to take a break and not participate. Please speak to your child's nurse before they start the procedure.

If your child sees that you are upset it could make your child feel anxious and upset too.

Negative / Unhelpful Words	Positive / Helpful Words
Hurt	Comfortable
Pain	Comfort
Sting	Cool
Itch	Heal
Worry	Calm
Panic	Clean

Tips for long procedures

- Keep your language helpful
- Replace negative word with positive words
- Distract your child by asking questions about a recent holiday, special occasion, favourite toy or activity
- Blow bubbles and ask questions i.e. count how many bubbles have you blown out?
- Ask your child questions to shift their focus from the procedure to something enjoyable
- During the procedure let your child know they are doing well – “well done”, “that’s great”, “that’s really good”.

Give your child some control; this can help alleviate some stress during a long procedure.

An example of this is providing your child with an option:

“When we change your dressing - would you like to sit up or lie down? Would you like to hold mum’s hand or your teddy?”

After the procedure

Congratulate your child on what a good job they have done and for their help.

“you have done so well – that’s really good”

Positive reinforcement is a crucial part of the procedure so the child feels as though they have been able to successfully do the procedure, making the next procedure a more positive experience.

Always reinforce partial successes too – these will add up to big wins over time.

Further reading –

Everybody Stay Calm – Angela McKenzie.

Useful videos and resources
everybodystaycalm.com.au

Non-English speaking: for information in languages other than English, call the interpreting and Translating Centre and ask them to call Department of Health. This service is available at no cost to you, contact (08) 8226 1990.

© Department of Health, Government of South Australia.
All rights reserved Revised April 2019

Words I can use to help my child during a procedure

Information for patients, parents & carers