



For caregivers

# Preparing for hospital admissions and medical procedures

Some children who receive medical treatment at hospital might require ongoing appointments (e.g. outpatient clinic), procedures (e.g., blood tests, injections, scans, surgery), rehabilitation exercises, or future hospital admissions.

Children and caregivers who have experienced a distressing medical procedure may understandably find the idea of future medical procedures or hospital visits very stressful. There are many strategies you can use to help prepare you and your child to reduce anxiety, build trust, manage the pain experience and ensure the procedure goes smoothly.



## Tips for planned hospital admissions

### 1. Prepare yourself

Find out what to expect when you go to the hospital and for the types of medical procedures they might need. Feeling more prepared will help you be more relaxed around your child. If you know you will find this difficult, think about what support strategies you might need (e.g. [Grounding strategies for coping with distress](#), ask another caregiver or support person to help or take your child, talk with child's treatment team).



**Watch videos and shows** for children about coming to hospital, different medical conditions and procedures and the role of medical workers.

**Try medical play** with your child at their own pace when they are relaxed. This can help them know what to expect for the procedure or treatment they will have and work through any difficult emotions they may have. You can be creative with toy medical kits, dress-ups, toys, dolls, craft or medical supplies. Frankie the plush puppy toy is perfect for this!

### 2. Talk to child a day or two before

Use simple words your child will understand. Stick to the facts about what will happen and who will be supporting them. Reassure your child that you or another caregiver will be with them whenever possible. Encourage your child to discuss their feelings and ask questions about hospitals and medical procedure. Be honest – if you don't know the answer, tell your child, "I don't know, but I'll find out and tell you."

Child-friendly ways to support conversations:

**Read children's books** about going to hospital, medical conditions and what medical workers do to help children get better. See the [Frankie stories](#) and recommended books about [Going to hospital](#) and [Healthcare professionals](#) for ideas.

Scan the QR code at the end of this tipsheet for additional information and resources (e.g. recommended websites, children's storybooks and shows) to help support conversations and medical play with your child.

### 3. Make a CALM care plan

Complete [My CALM care plan](#) with your child to help reassure and empower them with some choice over the situation and coping tools. Read the [CALM Care guide for parents and carers](#) and refer to [Frankie's procedures toolkit](#) for ideas.



## Tips for planned hospital admissions *continued*

### 4. Pack with your child

If they are old enough, let your child decide what favourite things they would like to bring to hospital. This might include their blanket, pyjamas, favourite activity or toy, comforters, photos of family and pets, distraction devices, or snacks. Pack anything needed to help implement the plan (e.g. numbing cream, buzzy bee device, iPad, comfort toy).

### 5. Practice relaxation and mindfulness

Teaching your child coping strategies like deep breathing, imagery and the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique can help them stay calm and manage distress.

See our [Relaxation and mindfulness strategies for children](#) tipsheet.



### 6. Praise and reward your child

After their procedure reward your child with plenty of praise, a treat and/or special activity. Don't forget to praise and reward yourself for getting through the experience as well!

### 7. Manage pain and discomfort

Follow the medical advice you receive to support any post-procedure pain or discomfort your child may have. Visit the Meg Foundation ([megfoundationforpain.org](http://megfoundationforpain.org)) website for more information and resources for understanding and managing acute and chronic pain.



### 8. Focus on the positives

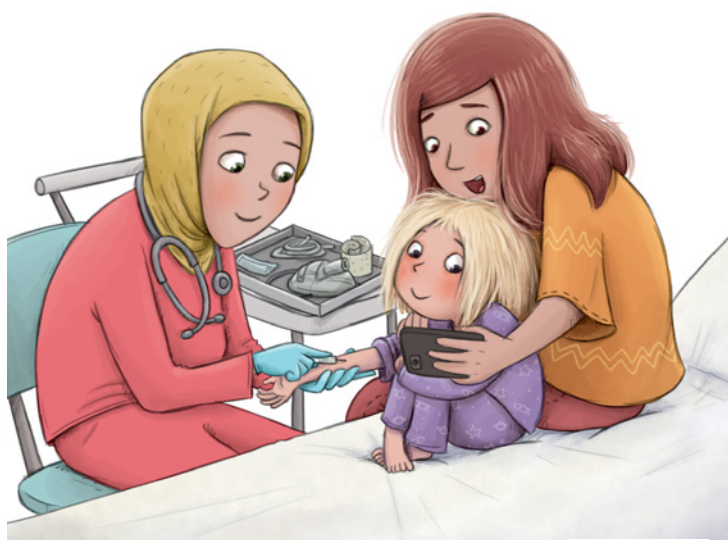
Describe all the things that the child did well (e.g. "You were so brave when you sat still while they changed your dressings, I'm so proud of you", "You were a pro with using your breathing exercises"). Talk about the positive or fun things that happened (e.g. the funny clown doctors, having cousins visit in hospital, yummy treats after surgery). This will increase your child's likelihood of developing positive memories of the experience and set them up for success next time.



## Tips for general medical procedures (e.g. blood tests, immunisation, GP check-up, dentist procedure)

1. **Discuss a plan with your child** to reassure and empower them with some choice over the situation and coping tools they can use to manage pain and anxiety. Use the [Frankie's procedures toolkit](#) for ideas.
2. **Read the [Comfort Positions: A Guide for Parents and Healthcare Professionals](#)** ([megfoundationforpain.org](http://megfoundationforpain.org)) to learn how you can hold your child to keep them calm, comfortable and safe during the medical procedure.
3. **Prepare the things needed to manage pain** (e.g. numbing cream, buzzy bee device), provide distraction and comfort (e.g. special toy, stickers, device, treats, bottle, bubble blower) and agreed upon reward for after procedure is over.
4. **Give your child choices whenever possible** to help them feel some control (e.g. "Which arm would you like the needle?", "Would you like to sit on the bed or chair?")
5. **Ask the medical professional to perform the procedure on their favourite toy first** (e.g. Frankie toy).

6. **Help distract your child** during the procedure (you could blow bubbles, bring out a treat, count or sing together, talk about their favourite topic, watch a screen etc.)
7. **Give lots of praise** and try to do a fun or relaxing activity immediately afterwards.



Visit [Frankie's Clubhouse](#) or scan this QR code for more information and resources for talking with and supporting children to manage pain and distress associated with going to hospital and medical procedures.

