

Fear of Needles and the COVID-19 Vaccine: A Guide for Caregivers

It is normal for people to be scared of needles. About 25% of people have a fear of needles. This rate may be even higher for people with disabilities. People with disabilities may be more sensitive to pain or have higher levels of anxiety than people without disabilities. However, medical procedures that use needles, like the COVID-19 shot, help keep everyone safe and healthy. Below are some tips to support people with disabilities when they have a fear of needles.



Tips to Support Adults and Children with Disabilities

- Talk about their fear. Let them know it is okay to be scared.
- Walk them through what will happen the day of the appointment. This will help them feel prepared. Social stories may help some people.
- Schedule the appointment with a health professional they already know, if possible.
- Get to the appointment early so they have time to prepare. Feeling rushed can increase stress and anxiety.
- Support them to talk to the health professional about their fears.
- Bring comfort items such as music, a phone game, or a fidget toy.
- Take deep breaths with them.
- Do not restrain or force the person during the procedure.
- Support them to get additional help or make a plan ahead of time if they have a very strong fear. Many types of therapy can help people with needle fear prepare for an appointment.
- Support with a Comfort Hold



Distraction Techniques

- Some people might find it helpful to be distracted during the process. Some options include:
- Carrying on a conversation
- Listening to music
- Bringing a book to read or play a game on a phone
- Playing with a fidget toy



Other Resources

- **Social Story for getting blood drawn:** www.johnson-center.org/downloads/pdfs/blood-draw.pdf. This social story uses visuals and helps to explain what the process of having blood drawn.
- **Social Story and Visuals for children on the autism spectrum:** www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/Blood%20Work%20Parents.pdf Social stories, visuals, and charts that can be printed out and used to provide support.
- **Buzzy Device:** vibrating toy to help distract from or decrease pain. BUZZY Device is a well-known example of this type of product: www.paincarelabs.com/buzzy
- **Deep Breathing Techniques:** Provided by the University of Michigan. Step-by-step instructions on how to practice deep breathing. www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/uz2255
- **The Fear Ladder:** The fear ladder is a tool that can be used to help overcome fears one step at a time. Examples and Information about the Fear Ladder: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/resources/patient-information/all-patients/overcoming-your-fear-of-needles.pdf
- **Exposure Therapy Information:** Exposure therapy provides a safe way to work on addressing fears by using slow exposure. www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/here-there-and-everywhere/202109/exposure-therapy-effective-treating-needle-phobia
- **Social Story with Visuals for Adults:** A visual guide to help explain the Covid-19 vaccine and the process for getting vaccinated. www.rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/publications/documents/GettingACOVID19VaccineSocialStoryIDD-F.pdf
- **Comfort Hold:** The comfort hold can provide physical support during medical procedures. www.nationwidechildrens.org/family-resources-education/health-wellness-and-safety-resources/helping-hands/comfort-hold-techniques