



Supporting your child's hospital journey

We know that coming into hospital can be a daunting experience for children and families. Even before surgery, your child might need to undergo numerous tests and procedures, which can be difficult for them to understand and may result in feelings of fear and anxiety. Here at The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH), we work to engage, educate and empower your child through their medical journey.

Medical Play Providing children with the opportunity to engage in medical play allows them to become familiar with real or toy medical tools in a relaxed situation in their own time. Research suggests that children benefit more from medical play when given time to play with the equipment and then process any emotional responses related to the experience. If you don't have a kit at home, you might like to consider purchasing one or borrowing one from a friend in the weeks leading up to your child's admission.

Positioning Helping your child get into a comfort position during procedures can strengthen their feelings of safety and control. This [resource](#) by the Comfort Kids program, outlines a range of positioning that is appropriate for different ages and procedures. Please ask your nurse about which position would be most appropriate for your child and procedure.

Distraction Distraction is a child's best friend when it comes to procedures. Choosing something that your child is already familiar with often works best. For example, watching and listening to favourite nursery rhymes or shows on an iPad or phone, reading a book together, or singing a familiar song. For younger children, you can practice blowing bubbles or a windmill. Bubbles are an excellent distraction—you can count them, blow them, find the biggest or smallest one or just watch them float and pop. This can help children control their breathing. It is a good idea to bring distraction items from home to have them on hand as needed.

Comfort Items Encourage your child to bring along any comfort items that might provide reassurance and familiarity to them. These might include a blanket, dummy, toy or favourite piece of clothing. For older children, this may be a device that they can play games or watch a favourite show on.

Visual Block Using a book or iPad as a visual block can reduce distress by focusing their attention to more pleasant things and away from the procedure. However, please be aware that some children prefer to watch procedures as this can strengthen their feelings of control.

Cream Numbing cream is available if your child is required to have blood taken from their vein. The *Buzzy Bee* (a small vibrating bee with blue ice-pack wings) is also available to help block sharp pain and provide distraction when giving injections or blood tests. Just like cool running water soothes a burn, *Buzzy Bee* uses a combination of cold and vibration to replace pain with temperature and movement.

Positive Experiences Providing your child with a positive play experience before and after a procedure can help 'book-end' the experience. This means that by supporting positive play interactions around the procedure, you can reframe the experience for your child.

Preparation and Resources Research has shown that with developmentally appropriate preparation, children can demonstrate increased coping and decreased distress during procedures.

[Our Be Positive \(B+\) videos](#) cover a range of hospital experiences and procedures from a child's perspective.

Many children have reported feeling more confident and prepared for their hospital experience after watching videos about procedures and tests including:

- [ECG](#)
- [ECHO](#)
- [Blood test](#)

With the recent addition of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) at the hospital, as well as the need for a COVID-19 swab for some children, the RCH has produced some additional videos to explain these new procedures:

- [COVID-19 swab](#)
- [PPE](#)

Visiting [Howie's Place](#) on the RCH website will also direct you to a cardiac specific interactive site where you can find out more about your child's hospital stay, cardiac procedures and tests, as well as information on heart conditions.

Please refer to and complete the Child Life Therapy form in the cardiac pre-admission pack if you feel that your child may require additional support during their experience. For more information please visit: www.rch.org.au/child-life-therapy