

Simple steps make shots less scary for kids, nurse says

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Parents can help their children handle the sting of getting vaccinated.

(HealthDay)—Many children get anxious or afraid when they have to get a vaccination, but there are a number of ways that parents can make these shots easier for their kids, an expert suggests.

The first step is to explain to [children](#) in an age-appropriate way that the vaccinations help protect their health, said Rita John, director of the pediatric primary care nurse practitioner program at Columbia University School of Nursing in New York City.

"Children need to know that vaccines aren't a punishment or something negative, vaccines are something that keeps them from getting sick," John said in a Columbia news release. "When parents are anxious, they pass that fear on to their kids. The best way to talk about vaccines is to keep the conversation positive and focused on the benefits of vaccination."

Before a vaccination, you can reduce toddlers' and preschoolers' anxiety if you give them a toy medical kit so that they can give pretend shots to you or a favorite doll or other toy.

When you arrive for the shot, ask the clinician to use a numbing cream or spray to limit the pain caused by the needle. Blowing on a bubble maker or a pinwheel can help distract younger children during vaccinations, while listening to music, playing games or texting may benefit older children and teens.

"If the kids think something is going to reduce their pain, there can be a placebo effect where the technique works because they expect it to work," John explained.

"It doesn't matter so much what you use to make your child more comfortable so long as you do something that acknowledges that they may experience some pain and that they can do something to make it hurt less," she added.

Be sure to reward and/or praise children after a vaccination. For example, give stickers to younger children. "You want the final part of the experience to make kids feel like even if they suffered some momentary [pain](#), it was worth it," John said.

"Good play preparation, a positive attitude about immunization, and bringing something to distract [kids](#) during the shots can all help make the experience better," she concluded.

More information: The U.S. National Library of Medicine has more about [childhood immunization](#).

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