

Helping My Sensory Needs

Everyday situations:

Medical Appointments



- Visiting appointments can be scary and stressful.
- Often there is a rush to get there and not be late, a busy waiting room, and an unfamiliar place.
- Adults are usually stressed, and children can tell how the adults are feeling.
- For children with extra needs, medical appointments can be extra challenging: loud noises, bright lights, strange things to do and items they haven't seen before that might touch them.

Parents & Health professionals can work together to help children have important medical checks, by parents teaching the medical staff what their child needs, and both together preparing the child well. We can also stay calm, and teach them step by step, to prepare for future appointments to go well.

Prepare your Child:

Play with toys that are related to medical appointments, such as toothbrushes, thermometers, scales.

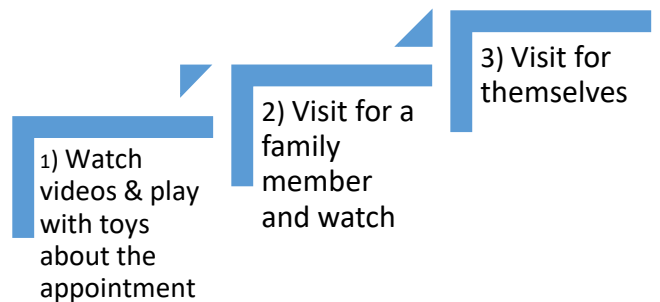
Find books at the library about doctors or dentists, and play dressing up with their equipment.

Watch videos of other children visiting the doctor or dentist.

Ask the appointment place for a video or pictures of the room you will visit.

Think about what toys and calming items are easy to bring with you.

Consider taking your child to appointments that are for siblings or yourself, so they can get to know the situation when they aren't expected to do anything other than watch. This might help them understand what is happening, and how things work.



Prepare the Appointment:

Consider what time of day your child is most likely to be happy and calm, Try asking for an appointment at a helpful time.



Prepare the health professionals, by making sure they know your child has additional needs.

Make a visual schedule, that's a set of pictures to represent each step of the day. For example: car, hospital, snack, car, park, home. You can use photos, drawings or pictures, it can be on your phone or in a printed copy.

Objects of Reference

Watch this video to see how you can use a toy or item, to represent the activity and help them understand what is coming next. For medical appointments, consider a toy stethoscope. Use this each time to prepare your child, if words and books (social stories) are not engaging for them.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vetUsvdjX1A>

On the day:

- Bring their favourite toys & snacks.
- If they are able to understand, explain 'now' doctor/dentist, 'next' and provide a preferred activity for afterwards e.g. 'park'.
- If they find this helpful, give them movement and deep pressure before the appointment e.g. run up the stairs, down & jump into parents arms for a hug.
- Advocate for your child's needs, ask for a break or a rest, ask to move to a more quiet room, ask if you can hold them during the appointment.
- Try to keep a calm and reassuring voice.
- If your child is becoming upset and needs to go, ask the health professional to give you a phone call or email later to discuss more, so you can leave.



Remember:

Avoiding anxiety & distress is very important, we don't want to create bad memories!

It's okay to have a 'visit' that is to become more familiar, and after more visits build comfort in the environment, then have a successful visit.



Keep the experience positive:

Decide what is most important: Often the child having a positive experience is much more important than 'achieving' the outcome of the appointment, because it means they are more likely to go back next time.

If they become very upset, think about taking a break, having a walk around the block, taking time out to play a game together to help them calm down, they trying to come back.

If they continue to be upset, consider ending the appointment there and come back another day.

Resources:

Social Stories:

- Going to the Doctor:
<https://paautism.org/resource/going-to-the-doctor-social-story/>
- Going to the Eye Doctor:
https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2519/a_visit_to_the_eye_center_child.pdf
- Getting & Wearing Glasses:
<https://www.necoeyecare.org/patient-information/resources/>

Toy doctor kits:

- <https://www.smythstoys.com/uk/en-gb/toys/fashion-and-dolls/kids-costumes-dress-up-and-face-paint/doctor-kit-set/p/159419>
- https://www.amazon.co.uk/Peterkin-4407-Medical-Carrycase/dp/B000RPDPSC/ref=sr_1_5?keywords=Toy+Doctor+Kit&qid=1690896375&sr=8-5