Supporting Your Child During Medical Procedures

Medical procedures are understandably challenging for many patients. With the support of family and staff, children can learn skills to better cope with procedures. If your child is experiencing difficulties with medical procedures, the following recommendations may be helpful.

Get on The Same Team: Acknowledge and validate your child's feelings, which will help them feel understood and supported. Commit to working with them to help make necessary procedures go as smoothly as possible.

> Example: "I can see that port access is really difficult and scary for you. Let's work together to figure out how we can help you feel more comfortable."

Plan Ahead: Make a coping plan ahead of time with your child's input. Giving them some control over which strategies to try is empowering and can make the plan more effective. Also, discussing and agreeing upon a plan in advance can make some aspects of the procedure more predictable and less anxiety provoking. Plans may include:

- Bringing a favorite toy or comfort item to hold
- Listening to or singing a favorite song
- Watching a video
- Using relaxation strategies like deep breathing, blowing bubbles, or listening to a meditation
- Asking questions/getting extra information from the team before the procedure

Provide Reinforcement: Trying new strategies in a challenging situation is hard work! Sometimes it helps to increase motivation by offering the chance the earn something special afterwards. Consider what your child finds rewarding and explain exactly how they can earn it (i.e., "If you try deep breathing during your port access, we'll get ice cream afterwards."). Regardless of whether your child follows through on the plan, be sure to provide verbal praise for any attempt to try.

Consult with Experts: If your child experiences significant distress during procedures and/or you are struggling to come up with a coping or reinforcement plan, consider reaching out to your Psychosocial Provider or Child Life Staff.