



Fred Rogers Timeless Wisdom



## Getting Ready for a Trip to the Doctor

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Even though children may have been going to the doctor since birth, there may come a time when a check-up becomes particularly upsetting. As children grow physically, they're also growing in awareness of their own bodies and their ability to remember painful past experiences. At the same time, in those preschool years, they have many fantasies and misconceptions.

### Caring Preparation

Children don't like to be probed and poked, especially when the probing and the poking happen unexpectedly. And they certainly don't like to have painful or uncomfortable things happening to them. Injections ("shots") hurt, if just for a moment, stethoscopes are often cold on a chest, and blood pressure cuffs often squeeze an arm. Everyone is better able to manage if we're prepared by knowing what may hurt as well as what probably won't hurt.

When children discover that we've been honest with them in preparing them for experiences, they grow in their trust not only of us, but also of their doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals. That trust will help them all through their life, as they begin to assume responsibility for their own health care needs.

### Play Can Make the Visit More Manageable

When children play about something that's scary for them, they feel more in charge of it. Put out materials in the housekeeping area and encourage doctor play. Talk about such things as getting a shot and having temperature taken. As part of facilitating the play, ask children to try and think of ideas that might help make the "pinch" easier to take. Maybe by sitting in mom or dad's lap, holding on to a "blankey" from home, singing a song really loudly, or having a stuffed animal or baby doll to get a pretend shot first! It may also help if you remind children that we take some medicine in our mouths, some with patches, and others with injections. Doctors and nurses know which kinds to give us to keep us healthy. Children don't need elaborate explanations – they're generally satisfied with simple, honest answers.

Of course, we can't anticipate all that will happen in a doctor's office, but we can be honest about what we do know. Children trust us more and more each time they find that we're doing our best to prepare them for whatever they have to go through.

## **Helpful Hints**

### **Before Going to the Doctor:**

- Talk about doctors and nurses as being kind and caring. Children also like to know that some doctors and nurses were children once, too. They know what it's like to be a child, and they studied a long time to learn how to help people be healthy. Children might also feel reassured to hear that some doctors and nurses are mothers and fathers with children of their own that they care for and love.
- A day or so before the doctor visit remind children and talk about what they can expect, like the doctor's equipment, possible procedures, and even the waiting room.

### **After the Doctor's Office:**

- When the doctor visit is over, encourage children to talk about what happened. Freely talking about the appointment can be very helpful.
- Doctor or dentist play after appointments is just as important as playing beforehand. Adults most often handle stressful experiences by talking about them, but most young children also play about them and draw pictures about them. They might even want to comfort their dolls or stuffed animals, very much like you've comforted them.



 **Strategy Song:** *When we do something new,  
let's talk about what we'll do.*

*Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* closely parallels the gentle tone and emphasis on social and emotional strategies that made *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* and Fred Rogers a TV icon. Fred's creativity and innovation continue to thrive in 21<sup>st</sup> century TV. Teachers and parents will enjoy revisiting his messages with a new generation of characters.