

Comfort at hospital

Needles, drips and scans go better when a child is held, not held down. Here is how to be their comfort.



Comfort positions — ask to hold your child instead of lying them flat

Babies & toddlers

Chest to chest, or side-lying skin to skin. Swaddle the free arm. Feeding, a dummy or a little sugar water at the moment of the needle all help.

Preschool & primary

Sitting on your lap, back against your chest, your arms in a cuddle around them. The arm being used rests on the bed or a pillow.

Older kids & teens

Sitting upright with your hand on a shoulder or hand to squeeze. Let them choose the arm, the seat and whether they watch.

Preparing & distracting, by age

Under 2 — no advance warning needed. Feeding, rocking, singing, a familiar smell or blanket.

2–5 years — tell them a few minutes before, in simple words. Bubbles, a spinning toy, counting, a song with actions.

6–11 years — explain that morning or the day before. Give jobs: hold the tape, count breaths, choose the plaster. Screens, "I spy", slow blowing.

12+ — explain fully, in advance, and give real choices. Music, phone, breathing, and permission to look away.

Questions you are welcome to ask

- Can I hold my child for this?
- Is numbing cream or spray an option, and how long does it need?
- Is there a play therapist or child life specialist available?
- Does this need to happen right now, or can we take five minutes?
- Who is the most experienced person to do this today?
- What happens next, and when will we know more?
- Can we stop and reset if my child needs a moment?

What to say

HELPS

"I am staying right here."
"You can squeeze my hand."
"It will feel like a firm push."
"Let's breathe out slowly, like this."

CAN BE UNHELPFUL

"It won't hurt."
"Don't cry, be brave."
"It's almost over" (if it isn't).
"If you're good, we'll get a treat."

Pack the comfort bag

Comfort toy or blanket	Dummy or bottle
Headphones and charger	Snacks and a water bottle
Spare clothes, socks, nappies	Medications and action plans
Medicare card, referrals	Something quiet to do
A jumper for the cold ward	Notebook for questions

Afterwards

Name what happened and what they did well — "you held your arm so still". Let them play it out with a toy doctor kit at home. If it went badly, say so honestly and tell them what will be different next time.