

## Attending appointments

Attending appointments might be an overwhelming experience for some children, this could be due to the noises, people, smells, or unexpected touch from strangers.

When booking appointments, it is advisable to let them know that the child has particular sensory preferences. They may be able to make adjustments such as a quieter waiting room or setting up a less visually distracting space or adapting equipment. They can also tell you what to expect on your visit to help prepare and set expectations.

Remember to think about your child's age, their sensory preferences, any potential risks and how these could be used to help your child attend appointments.

Area of difficulty	Strategy	Tick when strategy has been tried and add comments
Child is anxious or becomes distressed by appointments	Prepare the child with social stories™ or pictures of the place to make it feel predictable. For further information on social stories™ see: <a href="https://www.carolgraysocialstories.com">Social Stories - Carol Gray - Social Stories (carolgraysocialstories.com)</a>	
	Use visuals to break the task down and remind them of the order of each step.	
	Consider the other factors that may be influencing your child's anxiety/stress level. Consider booking appointments on days where there are fewer demands that cause your child stress.	
	If possible, gradually increase your child's familiarity to the setting and routine prior to the appointment e.g. firstly visiting the building, then sitting in the waiting area, then meeting the clinician, then watching parent engage in an appointment etc. If this has been "practised" a few times prior to the appointment it may help the child feel more regulated for their appointment.	
	Bring comforters, such as music/books/tablet/soft blanket to help as a distraction and to block other sensations out.	

	Encourage calming activities prior to appointments such as breathing and grounding activities. For some ideas see <a href="#">Breathing Exercises</a> for children.	
	Encourage your child to carry a backpack with fidget tools and weighted items inside to provide a deep calming pressure. The weight should not be excessive or affect their posture. Carrying a water bottle with a straw can also add to the weight of his bag and drinking through a straw can be a reassuring strategy.	
	Bring other calming, sensory activities, such as chewing gum, a weighted lap item, or a fidget toy.	
	Check if appointments can be booked at a time when less busy, such as the beginning or end of the day.	
Child has difficulty attending doctor appointments	Reduce auditory distraction in the waiting room with ear defenders/pods.	
	Wear a mask to reduce sensitivity to smells or bring own spritz/spray/pulse point roll on or place a scent on a hankie.	
	Request clinician to pre-warn prior to touch. Firm consistent pressure within your child's visual field will be easier to process. Asking the Dr to wear gloves might feel more comfortable to some children.	
Child has difficulty attending optician appointments	Request optician to pre-warn prior to touch, as above or, if possible, for child to e.g. hold open their own eyelid to maintain control over touch.	
	Ask the optician to pre-warn prior to bright flashes.	
	Offer child to sit on adult lap to help them feel more grounded.	
	See additional information: <a href="#">Going to the Opticians</a>	
	"Warm up" the mouth to prepare for touch. E.g. Have a cold drink of water, massage the cheeks, pull	

Child has difficulty attending Dentist appointments	funny faces in a mirror stretching the muscles and skin. Consider the use of chew toys.	
	Ask the dentist to pre-warn prior to lowering/raising the chair. Request the chair to be lowered as little as possible or try closing eyes when chair is lowered.	
	Bring sunglasses to avoid harsh lighting.	
	Block any loud/unfamiliar auditory input with ear defenders/pods.	
	See Worksheet-X Teeth Brushing in 'Paediatric Occupational Therapy Sensory Resource Pack' on our website.	
	See additional information: <a href="#">Going to the dentist</a>	
Child has difficulty attending the Hairdressers	Watch pictures/videos of the haircut process beforehand.	
	Start with a "low sensory" hair appointment e.g. dry cut rather than, colour, wash, blow-dry.	
	Ask to be seated near window/ edge of salon.	
	Offer child to sit on adult lap to help them feel more grounded.	
	Offer choices where possible.	
	Request to use own shampoos/conditioners.	
	Use mirrors to anticipate touch.	
	Tighter fitting clothes can prevent hair touching skin. Bring a change of clothes for as soon as you leave salon/barber.	
	Offer other tactile/visual or auditory input as a distraction, or a focus if distracted by the environment	
	Consider sensory breaks e.g. getting up and moving around regularly.	

	See <a href="#">Hair-Care Worksheet</a> in 'Occupational Therapy Sensory Resource Pack' on our website.	
Child has difficulty attending appointments for blood tests/vaccinations	Educate the child about the process of having vaccine as much as possible e.g. using story books, social stories™, or child friendly YouTube videos.	
	Use tactile/visual/auditory distractions that your child will engage with to block out other sensations.	
	Offer child to sit on adult lap to help them feel more grounded.	
	Request vaccine/blood test laying down.	
	Offer something to bite down on e.g. a chew toy or something to squeeze with non-jab arm when it is painful.	
	Request clinician pre-warns prior to touch or wears gloves, as above.	
	Prewarn when something cold is about to touch arm before vaccine.	
	'Prepare' the arm prior to the needle touching- apply firm pressure by either rubbing or placing your hand over the area.	
	If appropriate use analgesic prior to appointment	
	See additional information: <a href="#">NHS Top tips for supporting children and young people during vaccination</a>	
Child has difficulty attending physical therapy appointments	Use a mirror to anticipate touch.	
	If relevant, request therapist pre-warns prior to touch or wear gloves, as above.	
	Ask therapist to demonstrate on someone else or show you a video of how it unable to tolerate touch.	

### Useful resources

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/mental-health/seeking-help/asking-for-reasonable-adjustments> This can be a useful resource for guidance around seeking reasonable adjustments to support your child's needs in attending appointments.

[NHS Top tips for supporting children and young people during vaccination](#)