

Parent Guide - Helpful Hints to prepare your child to have bloods drawn

This guide offers strategies that can be used before or during appointments with your autistic child of any age. The focus is on having blood drawn, but some strategies are also helpful for other aspects of hospital visits.

This is an initiative in partnership with
Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda



Acknowledgements

This guide has been created as part of an initiative to support autistic people and their families during hospital visits. We would like to extend gratitude to all of those involved.

Specifically, the Council for Diversity, Equality, Inclusion and Belonging in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital have committed themselves to making the hospital a more inclusive space.

A huge thank you to the autistic individuals and their families who have shared their experiences and provided feedback.

Thank you to Vygon, who have generously donated the medical equipment included in this pack.



Value Life



Useful Tips before Phlebotomy Appointments

- Discuss the appointment in advance, using positive language and visuals. Don't lie about the negative aspects, but remain positive. For example, don't say the needle will be painless. Instead say it will be a small pinch but the pain will not last.
- Acknowledge your child's feelings and let them know it is okay if they are nervous.
- Prior to the appointment, ask the hospital what accommodations they can make. This could be providing a specific appointment time or assuring a quick waiting time.
- If your child wears a JAM card, this can make hospital staff and other patients aware of their autism.
- Prepare visual aids to use that your child is familiar with. Introducing schedules or token boards for the first time during a hospital appointment will only add more unknowns for your child.
- Decide on something that your child enjoys that they can do after the appointment.

Preparing Your Child to have Blood Drawn

Gradual Exposure

For children with sensory challenges, new sensations faced during a blood draw can be distressing. The unknown can add to anxiety your child may be feeling.

In the lead up to their appointment, you can help to desensitise your child to the blood draw process. This will involve **gradual, predicted** and **consented** exposure to the sensations experienced during a blood draw. When their appointment comes around, your child will be familiar with the process and know what to expect.



Wipes



Tourniquet



Needle-less syringe



Tape



Cotton balls



Gloves

Use this equipment to replicate blood draw process at home.

Preparing Your Child to have Blood Drawn

Steps of Gradual Exposure

- The end goal to build towards is to tie the tourniquet, wipe the arm, hold the syringe against the skin and tape a cotton ball on the area.
- Start slow! Begin with just holding the tourniquet on your child's arm for a moment.
- Each time, hold the tourniquet a little longer until your child is ready to have the tourniquet tied on their arm.
- Next time, tie the tourniquet on your child's arm and use a wipe to clean the area. Then, remove the tourniquet.
- Next time, repeat these steps and hold the syringe to your child's arm
- The next step will be placing a cotton ball to your child's arm.
- Once your child is comfortable with the cotton ball, add tape and encourage them to keep the cotton ball on their arm

Preparing Your Child to have Blood Drawn

Tips for Gradual Exposure

- Start the process when your child is calm and comfortable.
- Demonstrate using the equipment on yourself first. For example, tie the tourniquet onto your arm and allow your child to see it.
- The first stage may simply be letting your child see and touch the equipment
- Don't introduce each step too quickly. Even if your child seems comfortable, take it slow and make sure the process is predictable for your child.
- Make sure to stop if your child shows signs of discomfort or asks you to stop. Your child's tolerance may be different from day to day.
- The goal is to make the experience benign or even positive. Praise your child at each step.
- Use any visuals you plan to use during the appointment. This could be a first/then visual or a token board.

Preparing Your Child to have Blood Drawn



Role Play



What Does Role Play Mean?

Role playing allows children to practice a medical scenario at home in a play-based way. Children can take on the role of the doctor and treat a teddy or parent as their patient. The child can also practice being the patient. The equipment (pictured previous) can be used as props for your child play.

Role playing can look different for every child, depending on how they like to play. Not every child will have the interest or ability to enact the hospital appointment through play. That's ok! Encourage your child to play with the equipment another way.

Incorporate songs and stories related to hospital visits to enrich your child's play.



How Can Role Play Help?

- Play-based strategies introduce elements of a hospital appointment to your child in a fun way. This allows them to create positive associations with a hospital visit
- Role play scenarios can present opportunities to discuss a hospital visit with your child in a relaxed context. It can help your understand your child's perspective.
- Play based strategies can give your child a sense of control. For this reason, it is important to let them direct their play.
- Role playing can help your child to understand the process of the medical appointment and understand medical staff's roles.

During the Appointment

Useful Tips

- Bring comfort items or favourite toys to the appointment. These items can keep your child calm and help redirect your child's attention if they are anxious.
- Speak to the hospital staff that will be working with your child. Make sure they are aware of your child's needs so they can make accommodations where possible.
- Use visual aids to support your child during their appointment. Use visual aids that your child is familiar with using.
- Practice deep breathing that can help your child relax during a procedure. Deep breathing can be taught using exercises like 'smell the flowers, blow the candles' etc.
- Praise your child's effort and don't focus on anything your child is doing 'wrong'.
- Keep calm! Hospital appointments can be equally anxiety inducing for caregivers. Modelling a calm and positive attitude will help your child to do the same.

During the Appointment

Reinforcement

What is reinforcement?

Reinforcement recognises and encourages your child's positive behaviours. Positive reinforcement means providing a desirable outcome when a child engages in positive behaviour or completes a task.

Reinforcement is commonly used with children and is particularly helpful for autistic children as it aids their understanding of expected behaviours.

Using Reinforcement During Blood Draw

- Prior to the appointment, allow children to choose the reinforcer they would like to receive after the appointment. The reinforcer can be chosen from a choice board of their favourite items and activities. Alternatively, your child can choose their reinforcement using their preferred mode of communication.
- The reinforcement provided for your child's blood draw should be a high-value reinforcer. This means it highly motivates your child and it is something that is not always available to them.
- Reinforcers can be given at different stages throughout the appointment if needed, eg. after waiting room.
- Visual aids can be used to support the use of reinforcement.

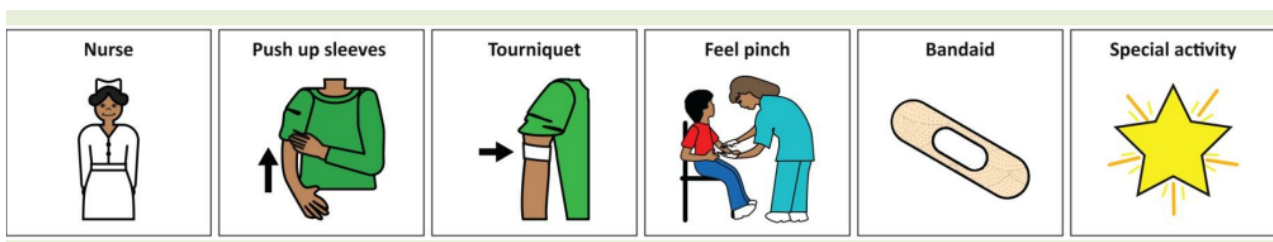
Visual Aids

Schedules

What are Visual Schedules ?

A visual schedule is a sequence of pictures of each step in a routine. This provides predictability for your child in a new situation and supports positive transitions.

They can be used during a hospital appointment to break down the procedure itself, or to detail the transitions involved in the visit.



Example of a visual schedule

Using Visual Schedules

- Break down the routine into small steps that your child can understand.
- Give your child some verbal guidance when using the schedule. This could mean prompting your child to check their schedule, pointing to the current step and saying it's time for ____'.
- When a step is completed, this should also be visually demonstrated. For some children, it works best to simply remove the picture of that step. Alternatively, you can have space for a tick to be placed beside completed steps.
- The final step of the schedule should be reinforcement provided for completing the previous steps.

Visual Aids

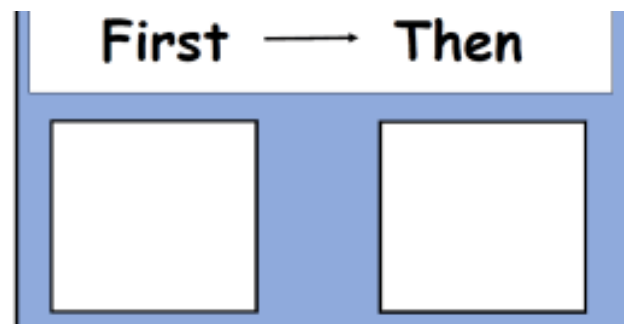


Visual aids are a communication tool which can support a child's understanding using pictures. Visual aids such as schedules, first/then charts and token boards are visual aids which can be useful for hospital visits.

First/Then Board

What are First/Then Boards ?

First/then boards are two-picture visuals of steps within a routine. They are similar to schedules in their function, as they help provide predictability and positive transitions.



Using a First/Then Board

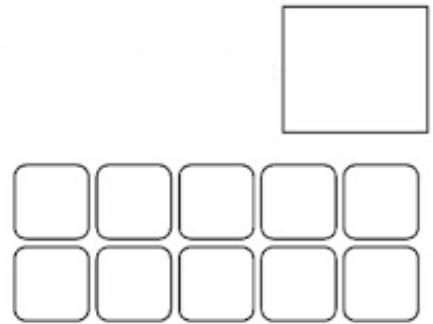
- First/then boards are simpler and may be easier to understand, so they can be used before your child has mastered using a schedule.
- They can also be used alongside a schedule to provide a more short term goal to reach.
- A sand timer can also be used to aid your child's understanding of how the 'first' stage will last, before moving on to 'then'.
- The 'then' picture can be a reinforcement for completing the 'first' stage, particularly if your child is using the first/then board by itself.

Visual Aids

Token Boards

What is a Token Board?

A token board is a visual support tool which demonstrated the progress a child is making in completing a task. The board will have spaces for a number of tokens and a picture of the reinforcement the child is working towards.



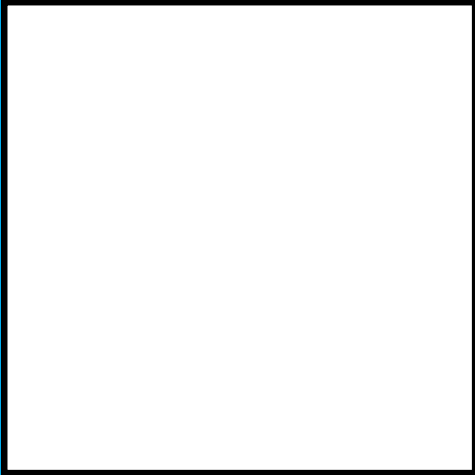
Using a Token Board

- A token board can be used during the blood draw process to reinforce your child's positive behaviours, such as sitting still. Communicate with the nurse that you will be using a token board.
- Allow your child to choose their reinforcement they want to receive after the appointment.
- During the blood draw, make sure the tokens are given in quick increments and paired with verbal phrase, "You're sitting still, you got a token".
- Do not take tokens away for undesired behaviour. A token board should be used to aid your child's understanding of the process and should not be used as a punishment. Instead, continue to reinforce any effort they are making.

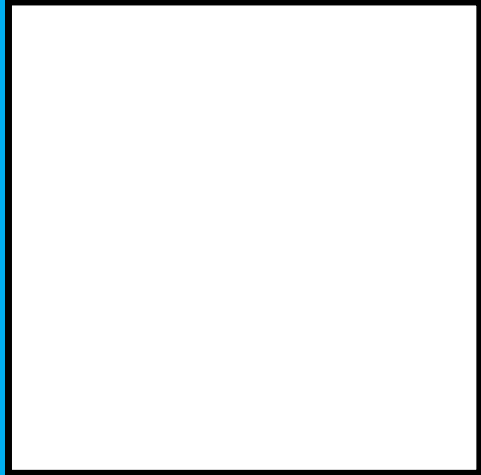
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Schedule

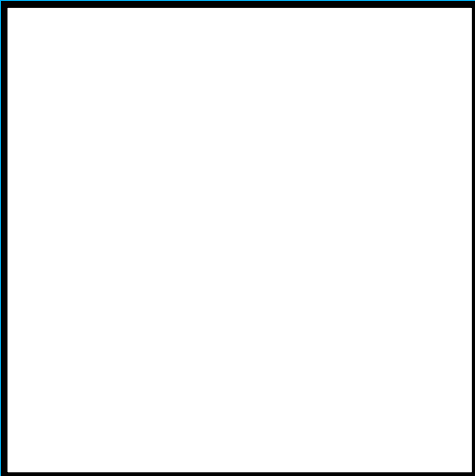
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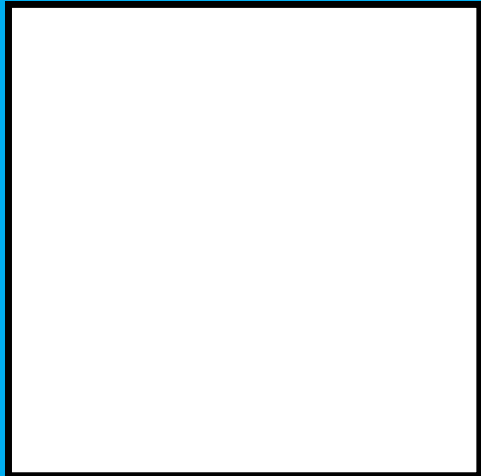
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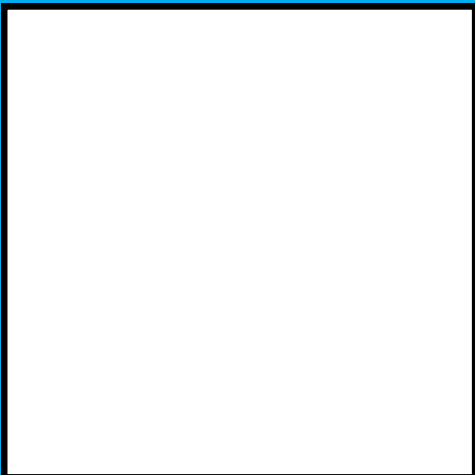
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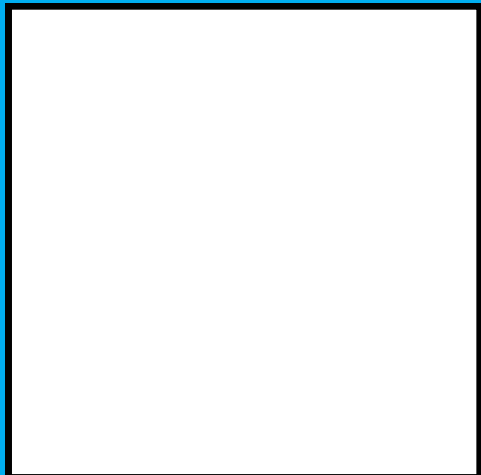
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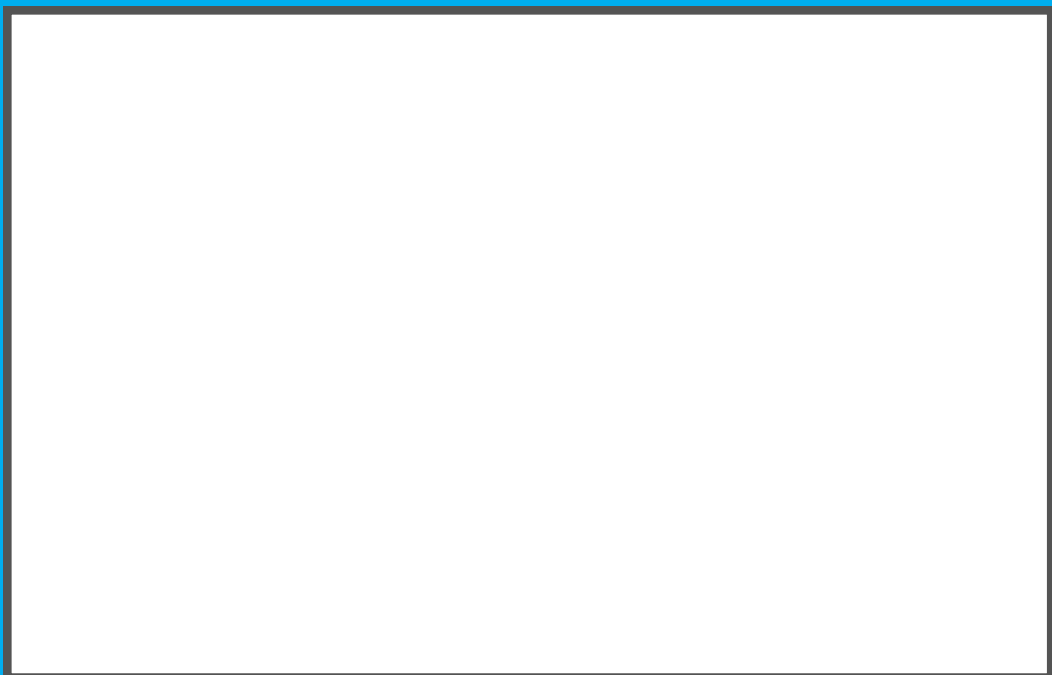
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First/Then

Then

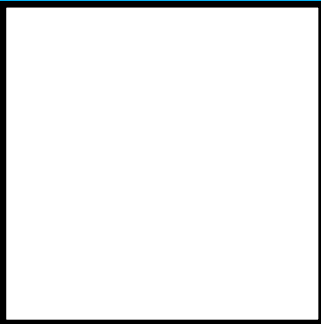
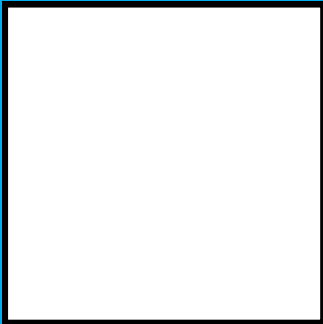
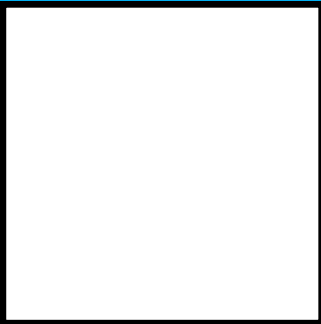
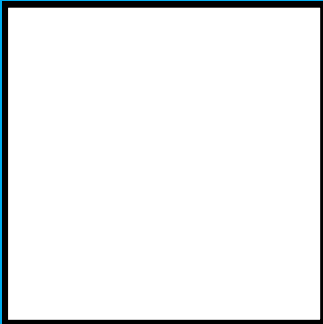
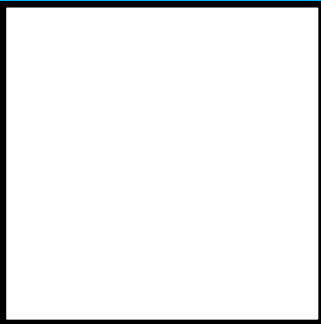
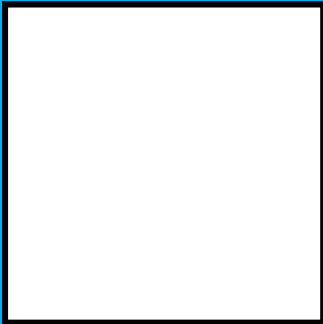
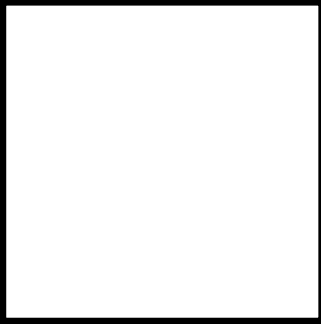
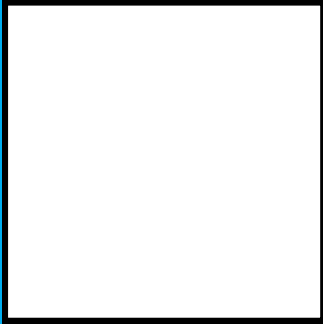
A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for notes or observations related to the 'Then' section.

First

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for notes or observations related to the 'First' section.

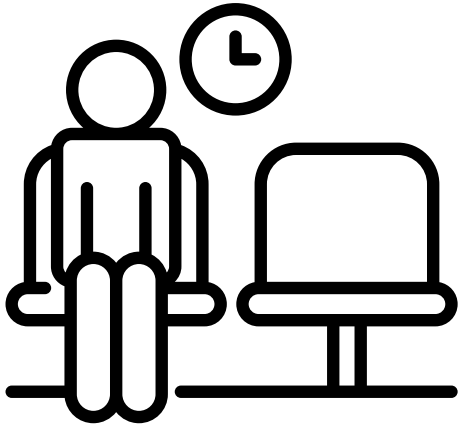
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Token Board

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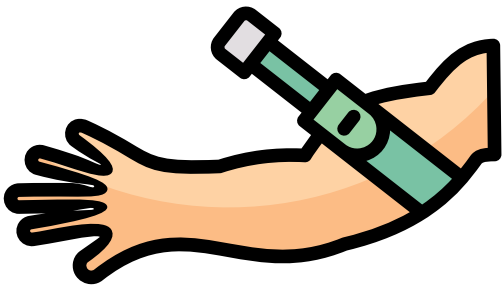
Useful Visual Pictures



Waiting Room



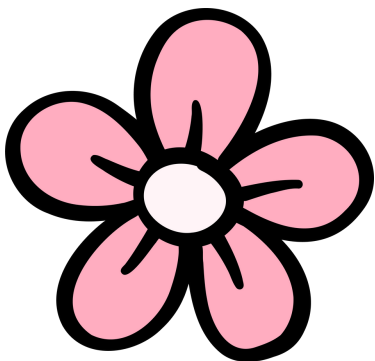
Nurse



Tourniquet



Wipe Arm



Smell Flowers



Blow Candles

Appendix

Useful Visual Pictures

