



# IMPROVING THE VACCINATION EXPERIENCE:

A guide for parents and caregivers

The **CARD system (Comfort, Ask, Relax, Distract)** provides groups of strategies that can be used before and during vaccination to make the experience a more positive one for you and your child. Learn how you and your child can **play your cards** to reduce the pain, stress and worries associated with vaccinations.

To learn more about CARD, go to [AboutKidsHealth.ca/CARD](https://AboutKidsHealth.ca/CARD).



## COMFORT

### How you can play your Comfort CARD

Review information factsheets like this one to know why vaccination is recommended, what to expect and ways you can make yourself more comfortable. After you prepare yourself, prepare your child.

- Give your child information about the vaccination and why they are getting it. Tell them what will happen, how it will feel and give them options for coping.
- Involve and listen to your child. They often have helpful suggestions for how to manage their pain (for example, they can choose a toy to bring).
- Provide balanced information. Do not say that vaccination will not hurt. Instead, describe sensations (e.g., Some people say they feel “pressure” or a “pinch” or “nothing at all”) and duration (e.g., it lasts “about a second”) and invite your child to tell you how it felt (e.g., “I don’t know how it will feel for you. Let me know how it felt when you are done.”)
- Communicate using neutral language (e.g., “What do you want to be doing when you get the vaccine?”). Do not use words that elicit fear (e.g., the needle “stings”) and do not use repetitive reassurance (e.g., “You’ll be fine”) or dismiss concerns (e.g., “Don’t worry”).
- Find out what coping strategies your child wants to use and plan for them ahead of time (e.g., distraction items, topical anesthetics). Topical anesthetics are medicines that temporarily numb the skin and reduce the pain from the needle poke. They are sometimes called ‘numbing creams.’ They can be purchased from a pharmacy.

### How your child can play their Comfort CARD

Encourage your child to prepare for vaccination day. Some things they can do to feel comfortable are:

- Select comfort items to bring such as a favorite item.
- Select a short-sleeved shirt or loose-fitting shirt they can wear that lets their upper arm be reached easily.
- Practice relaxing their arm and making it loose or jiggly.
- Practice [squeezing their knees together](#) just in case they feel faint or dizzy.

Financial contribution from



Public Health  
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé  
publique du Canada



## ASK

Ask questions to be prepared.



## ASK

### How you can play your Ask CARD

Make sure your questions are answered so that you feel comfortable and prepared. Some questions you can ask include:

- Why is this vaccine recommended?
- What will happen? What will it feel like?
- How will my child's preferences be accommodated?

### How your child can play their Ask CARD

Invite your child to ask questions to help them be more prepared for their vaccination. If you can, answer your child's questions or search for the information together. If your child does not seem interested or is not ready to talk, that is OK. Tell them they can always come to you if they have questions. To help your child be more prepared for their vaccination they can ask questions such as:

- What will happen? What will it feel like?
- Can I bring a friend or family member?
- Can I have privacy?
- Can I use a numbing cream to dull the pain?
- Can I lie down?

## RELAX

Keep yourself calm.



## RELAX

### How you can play your Relax CARD

Your actions and words can influence your child's reaction. Foster a calm environment and be positive. If you are calm and use your normal voice, your child will feel that everything is OK.

- Think of things that normally keep you relaxed.
- If you are nervous, take deep belly breaths. Do this by taking slow deep breaths into your belly, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.

### How your child can play their Relax CARD

Encourage your child to stay calm and relaxed. To help prepare your child for their vaccination they can:

- Practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing.
- Practice positive self-talk (tell yourself you can handle this).

## DISTRACT

Shift your attention to something else.



## DISTRACT

### How you can play your Distract CARD

Try to limit the amount of time you are focused on the vaccination if it is making you nervous or worried.

### How your child can play their Distract CARD

Encourage your child to limit the amount of time they are focusing on the vaccination if it is making them nervous or worried.

- If your child is interested in being distracted, they can select some distraction items to use to take their mind off the vaccination.