Preparing your child for a blood test at Children’s National

Before the blood test visit:
• Use visual supports at home, school, or therapy to prepare (www.childrensnational.org/autismvisualresources)
  • Teaching Story: Having a Blood Test
  • Role Play Instructions
  • Visual Schedule: Blood Test
  • Videos (ex: www.johnson-center.org/videos/Blood Draw.mp4)
  • Autism Speaks ATN/AIR-P Blood Draw Tool Kit
• Talk with your pediatrician about whether numbing cream or relaxing medication should be used.
• Take a tour of the office where the blood test will take place and plan a reward after blood draw visit.
• Pack a bag with comfort items, favorite toys, communication device, internet device, or favorite foods.
• Plan the visit on the least busy day/time of the week. Call Children’s lab 202-476-5355/2096 for more info.
• Select choices below and show to the phlebotomist at the time of visit:
  - Use short simple terms without too much detail or lengthy explanation
  - Limit instructions to one step at a time; do not request multiple tasks at once
  - Use one voice to talk and provide explanations about steps of blood draw
  - Prepare and hide medical equipment until ready for use, so child does not see
  - Invite to watch or participate by demonstrating or allowing to play with equipment
  - Provide concrete choices when appropriate
  - Offer praise and reward for cooperation
  - Allow to use communication device, pen/paper, or iPad to write on
  - Use a visual schedule to communicate steps of procedure

During blood draw visit:
• Environmental considerations:
  • Ask if child life, art therapy, or music therapy support is available.
  • Let the staff know if long wait times will be difficult for the child.
  • Ask if an alternative waiting area in a quiet, less busy area is available.
  • Take your child for a walk or find a clear area if your child needs movement during wait time.
• Physical considerations:
  • Use comforts holds, if possible, or ask another person to hold the arm for phlebotomist.
  • Ask what is available for pain management, such as PainEase cold spray or buzzy device.
  • Use distraction techniques (music, fidgets/toys, electronic device, bubbles, counting, deep breathing)
  • Avoid forcefully holding your child to avoid trauma and fear.
• If your child is stressed, anxious, or has challenging behavior:
  • Ask for time and space to let your child recover. Then review the process and expectations again.
  • Minimize stimulation and presence of unnecessary staff.
  • Offer reassurance and choice of favorite things or activity.
  • Bring in a new distraction (ex: light up toy, musical fidget, tablet, etc).
  • End the visit if your child is unable to cooperate without forcing them. Contact Beyond the Spectrum to plan the next visit: 202-476-2884 or BeyondtheSpectrum@childrensnational.org

After the blood draw visit:
• Inform your child they are all done and move on to next activity.
• Provide your child with a reward. (ex: stickers, toy, food, praise, activity, etc.)
• Take note of what worked and what didn’t to prepare for the next blood test visit.