

## Positive Language Guide for Patients and Caregivers

### Positive language about pain

Language is a very powerful tool and will impact you and/or your child's experience during and after a laboratory collection. Being present for your child is helpful, but it is equally important to be a calm presence. Your child will sense if you are worried or distressed about the collection which may heighten their level of negative anticipation before and distress during the procedure. Use these tips to help answer common questions your child may ask you.

### Before the collection

Be honest with your child, and tell them that they will be going to the laboratory for a blood collection and/or Electrocardiogram (ECG). Keeping your child's trust is important. You can help reduce your child's worries by describing what will happen (what they will see, hear, etc.) and also why it will happen, as best you can. You can explain that sometimes we need to have a blood collection or other laboratory procedure to make sure we stay as healthy as possible.

### What to tell your child when they ask if it will hurt?

Leading up to a collection, this is likely going to be the most common question you will receive. Below are some tips on things you can say.

- "I don't know what you're going to feel, but if you use the strategies we talked about [*planned distraction, numbing cream, etc.*], it won't bother you so much. Maybe you can tell me what it felt like when we're done".
- "I have some ideas that will really help you feel more comfortable and in control" (If you have planned a distraction, purchased numbing products, etc.)
- "Isn't it amazing when you take those big belly breaths, how it makes your body feel so calm, so relaxed".
- Use words like "discomfort" or "uncomfortable" instead of "hurt", "pain" or "painful". Saying that something "won't hurt much" still implies that it is going to hurt, which may not actually be your child's experience. Similarly, telling your child not to worry or that they do not have anything to worry about, may actually cause them to worry.
- Use encouraging language like "You can do this" if your child is expressing that they can't or won't have their blood collected.

### During the collection

- Some words of encouragement would be "You are doing such a great job keeping your arm still, let's keep taking those deep breaths" and remind the child of what their job is.
- Distract your child, praise them, and coach them to use the techniques you may have planned. This will minimize attention to the blood collection.
- If your child is having a tough time, do not dismiss how they are feeling. Saying things like "Don't be such a baby" or "Aren't you a big boy/girl?" are not helpful and may lead to challenging experiences in the future. Also avoid apologizing. Saying you are sorry suggests that there is something to be sorry for. Laboratory collections are nothing to be sorry about, as 70% of decisions about your health are based on the results of laboratory tests!

### What to do after the collection

Pain is not over when the blood collection ends. Memory reframing can alter distressing memories and can reduce worry about future laboratory collections. Help your child remember the good things and praise them on being brave and what a great job they did. Focusing on the positive parts helps your child be less scared the next time. And being less scared helps things go better and hurt less.

*Developed in partnership with Child Life Specialists at the Alberta Children's Hospital.*

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