



SHOT DAY SURVIVAL GUIDE

8 PROVEN STRATEGIES FROM PARENTS & PEDIATRIC NURSES

for making vaccination appointments calmer, faster, and even a little fun.

Welcome, parent.

You booked the appointment. You're showing up. You're doing the right thing for your child — even when it's hard.

This guide is for you.

Every strategy was gathered from parents who have lived it, and pediatric nurses and pharmacists who have watched it play out thousands of times.



QUICK REFERENCE

8 STRATEGIES AT A GLANCE

- 1** Tell them on the day of — not the night before

- 2** Use honest, calm language — not misleading statements

- 3** Choose your words carefully in the lead-up

- 4** Select the MedBuddy before the office visit

- 5** Give them a real choice in the room

- 6** Stay calm — even if you're not feeling it

- 7** Redirect — look at your MedBuddy

- 8** Celebrate loudly, specifically, and immediately after

Keep this guide handy for your next appointment



THE 8 STRATEGIES – FULL GUIDE

01

Tell them on the day of — not the night before.

Reduce anticipatory anxiety before it starts.

The longer a child has to think about an upcoming injection, the more their brain's threat-detection system prepares a full defensive response. Research found that children told on the morning of the appointment had significantly less pre-procedure anxiety than those told the night before.

Tell them clearly, calmly, and on the day — not the night before. Give them enough time to process and ask questions, but not enough time to spiral.

★ **PARENT TIP:** If your child is school-age, tell them after the car ride to school in the morning of the appointment and reinforce that their MedBuddy® will be there for support — not the night before bedtime, when anxiety peaks.

02

Use honest, calm language — not misleading statements.

Build the trust that makes every future visit easier.

“It won’t hurt at all” is the most common thing parents say — and one of the least helpful. When the shot does sting, even briefly, the child learns you weren’t telling the truth. That erosion of trust makes the next appointment harder before it’s even booked.

Try instead: “The nurse is going to give you a quick injection. It might feel like a pinch for just a second — and then it’ll be done. I’ll be right there the whole time.”

★ **PARENT TIP:** Avoid the words ‘shot,’ ‘needle,’ and ‘brave’ in the lead-up. Try ‘vaccine,’ ‘medicine,’ and ‘I’ll be right here.’



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03

Choose your words carefully in the lead-up.

Language shapes expectation — and expectation shapes experience.

The language you use around the appointment — the day of, in the car, in the waiting room — creates the emotional frame your child brings into the exam room. Certain words reliably increase fear. Others reliably reduce it.

AVOID THESE

- ✗ 'Shot' or 'needle'
- ✗ 'It's going to be fine'
- ✗ 'Be brave'
- ✗ 'It won't hurt'
- ✗ 'Almost done'
- ✗ Details about the procedure in advance

USE THESE INSTEAD

- ✓ 'Vaccine' or 'medicine'
- ✓ 'Quick' and 'just a moment'
- ✓ 'I'll be right here the whole time'
- ✓ 'It might feel like a pinch'
- ✓ 'Look at your MedBuddy'
- ✓ 'You get to choose your buddy today'

★ **PARENT TIP:** If your child asks 'will it hurt?' say: 'It might feel like a tiny pinch for just a second, and then it's done. I'll be right there.'



THE 8 STRATEGIES — FULL GUIDE

04

Bring a MedBuddy® — the chosen comfort method.

Active attention is neurologically different from passive entertainment.

There is a critical difference between passive distraction (a video playing in the background) and active distraction (something the child is genuinely focused on). Research shows that active distraction measurably reduces pain signal processing in the brain.

Gate Control Theory confirms that focused attention on an external stimulus competes with pain processing pathways. Bring the MedBuddy your child chose — something that belongs to this moment.

★ **PARENT TIP:** Let your child choose their MedBuddy the day of — or better yet, at the appointment itself. Ownership makes it significantly more effective.

05

Give them a real choice in the room.

Autonomy reduces the fear response before the needle is anywhere near them.

Children who feel they have no control over what's happening experience measurably heightened fear responses. Offering even small, genuine choices — which arm, where to sit, which MedBuddy to hold — restores a sense of agency that directly reduces baseline fear.

The choice doesn't need to be significant. It needs to be real. 'Which arm would you like?' gives a child something they control.

★ **PARENT TIP:** At home, let your child choose what they wear to the appointment. A small choice before you arrive builds the autonomy habit that matters in the room.



THE 8 STRATEGIES – FULL GUIDE

06

Stay calm — even if you're not feeling it.

Your nervous system is contagious. Use that to your advantage.

Children are extraordinarily sensitive to their parents' emotional state. Research shows that parental anxiety during an injection measurably increases the child's pain response — even when parents believe they are hiding it.

The calmer you can be — in your voice, your body language, your breathing — the more that calm transmits. Take a breath before you walk in. Keep your voice even. Smile when you can.

★ **PARENT TIP:** Take three slow breaths in the car before walking in. Your heart rate drops. Your voice steadies. Your child feels it before you say a word.

07

Redirect — don't count down.

Give their brain something better to do than wait for the discomfort.

'Almost done,' 'just one more second' — these require your child to have a reliable sense of time during a fear state. They don't. These phrases are frequently disbelieved, and the trust damage compounds.

Redirection is more effective: 'Look at this.' 'Tell me about your buddy.' 'What color is that?' Focused visual and cognitive redirection is one of the most effective pain management strategies in pediatric care.

★ **PARENT TIP:** Practice redirection questions at home before the appointment: 'What would you name a toy dinosaur?' 'If your buddy could talk, what would they say?'



THE 8 STRATEGIES – FULL GUIDE

08

Celebrate loudly, specifically, and immediately after.

The ending shapes the memory. Make the ending unforgettable.

Research confirms that experiences are remembered largely by how they end. A child who leaves with a loud, specific, joyful celebration forms a fundamentally different memory than one who is simply told 'good job' on the way out.

Be specific. Be immediate. Be enthusiastic. The celebration needs to happen in the room, in the moment.

★ **PARENT TIP:** Plan your celebration in advance. Know what you're going to say, who you may call, what you're going to do on the way home.

SHOT DAY CHECKLIST

The night before:

- Plan what you'll say to celebrate after
- Set a reminder to tell them in the morning
- Take three deep breaths. You've got this.

The morning of:

- Tell them about the appointment calmly
- Use words from Strategy 3
- Let them choose something small
- Let them choose their MedBuddy

In the waiting room:

- Stay calm in body, voice, and face
- Keep conversation light and forward
- Let them hold their MedBuddy

In the exam room:

- Give them a choice — which arm, where to sit
- Activate the MedBuddy
- Don't say 'almost done' — redirect
- Stay in their sightline

Immediately after:

- Celebrate loudly, specifically, right now
- Name exactly what they did well
- Make a phone call, do a happy dance
- Note what worked — for next time