



# Doctor's Office Tips

## Evidence-Based ABA Supports for Medical Appointments

### Call the Doctor Beforehand (Antecedent Strategies)

#### Reduce triggers before they occur

- Inform the office that your child has special needs
- Share effective supports:
  - Calm voice
  - Explaining steps before touch
  - Short, clear instructions
- Request low-traffic appointment times:
  - First or last appointment of the day
- Ask for environmental accommodations:
  - Waiting in the car until the room is ready
  - Reduced waiting room time
  - Permission to bring sensory supports

**ABA rationale:** Altering antecedent conditions reduces the likelihood of escape-maintained or anxiety-driven behavior.

### Play Doctor at Home (Behavioral Rehearsal & Desensitization)

#### Practice without pressure

- Use toy doctor kits, dolls, or stuffed animals
- Rehearse component behaviors:
  - Sitting on a chair
  - Allowing brief touch
  - Opening mouth or holding still
- Keep practice:
  - Short
  - Predictable
  - Positively reinforced

**ABA rationale:** Behavioral rehearsal and graduated exposure increase tolerance through desensitization and response shaping.

### If Shots Are Being Administered

#### Preparation, Coping, and Reinforcement

#### Before the visit (Antecedent + Rule-Governed Behavior)

- Use honest, simple language:
  - "The doctor will give a quick poke"
- Pair with temporal cues:
  - Countdown (5-4-3-2-1)
- Identify a high-value reinforcer reserved only for shots

**ABA rationale:** Clear expectations and exclusive reinforcers increase predictability and motivation.



### During the shot (Coping + Differential Reinforcement)

- Offer coping supports:
  - Deep pressure (if tolerated)
  - Distraction (tablet, song, counting)
- Reinforce approximations:
  - "You're holding your arm still"
  - "You stayed with me"

**ABA rationale:** Differential reinforcement strengthens adaptive responses under aversive conditions.

### After the shot (Immediate Reinforcement)

- Deliver the isolated reinforcer immediately
- Provide labeled praise:
  - "You were brave and held still"
- Allow calming time post-procedure

**ABA rationale:** Immediate reinforcement increases future compliance and tolerance.

### Pack a Doctor Comfort Kit (Stimulus Control)

#### Support regulation and engagement

- Headphones
- Fidget or tactile item
- Comfort object
- Tablet or book
- Visual supports (First-Then, schedule)
- Preferred snack (if permitted)

**ABA rationale:** Access to regulating stimuli supports engagement and reduces competing behaviors.



### During the Visit (Prompting & Shaping)

#### Reinforce small successes

- Use visual sequences:
  - "Car → Doctor → Reinforcer"
- Ask the provider to:
  - Demonstrate on a toy or parent first
  - Explain steps prior to action
- Provide praise for:
  - Sitting
  - Staying in the room
  - Allowing brief contact

**ABA rationale:** Prompting and shaping reinforce successive approximations toward tolerance.

### After the Visit (Closure & Generalization)

#### End on success

- Review what went well
- Add a sticker or mark to a Brave Chart
- Provide downtime to regulate
- Celebrate effort, not perfection

**ABA rationale:** Clear expectations and exclusive reinforcers increase predictability and motivation.

