

## Doctor Visits

In the first two years of a child's life, he/she is making frequent trips to the doctor's office. Sometimes these visits are unpleasant for the child, whether he is getting scheduled vaccinations or she is feeling miserable with an earache or other illness. In order to take the fear out of these visits, parents can use some simple techniques.

Even very young infants sense their parents' feelings, so talk about your child's upcoming pediatric visit in a matter-of-fact tone. For young infants (6-8 months), you can just mention the visit that morning. For children over one year, it is a good idea to prepare them one or two days in advance. Help your child recall some pleasant facts about the toys that are there, the doctor or nurse you regularly see, or a surprise he/she might receive from the doctor at the end of the visit. Convey the idea that doctors and nurses are people who help us.

Books about medical visits can be very helpful, as can playing doctor with your child, whether at home, preschool, or at a local children's museum equipped with a pretend doctor's office. If you can obtain a real stethoscope to experiment with, your child will not be so bewildered by the strange procedures at the pediatrician's office. There are many toy medical kits available that inspire imaginative play (check age requirements on the packaging) that will also be useful in preparing for a doctor visit. If your child will be receiving a vaccination, you can practice with a pretend "needle." Respect your child and his trust in you: be briefly honest if he asks if the shot will hurt. Explain that the needle looks scary, and it may pinch for a few seconds, but it helps keep him healthy. Let him give you a pretend shot, and ask him to bandage the spot.

Hopefully you will not experience an emergency medical situation with your child, but if you do, she may be restrained in a "papoose-like cloth" (a restraining device for stitches, blood work, etc.), or she may even ride in an ambulance. After such an experience, you can help your child work through fears by talking to her about it and even role-playing the experience once it is over. Expect that a traumatic medical emergency will have some impact on your child's behavior for a period of time; be patient and supportive as she works these feelings out.