



# Needle Phobia Handout for Youth and Parents/Caregivers



*To be used independently or together with the FAST-A Workbook for Youth*

**What is Needle Phobia and why is it a problem?** Anxiety is a normal, natural feeling that everyone has and it is pretty normal to be fearful of something that might hurt you (like getting a shot or poke). For some people, this fear grows too big for the situation and interferes with doing medical procedures that you need for your health, like shots, injections, or blood draws.

**Will I faint?** Some people feel faint or do faint when they see blood or have to get an injection or blood draw. If this sounds like you, practice the **Applied Tension Technique** when doing exposures. The Applied Tension Technique involves tensing the muscles in your body (not the muscles involved with the poke!), which then raises your blood pressure. If your blood pressure increases, you are less likely to faint. To do this, tense the muscles not involved in your poke for about 10-15 seconds, then relax and repeat. The goal is not to become completely relaxed, as this would cause your blood pressure to drop. Instead, the goal is to let your body return to a normal state (not overly tense or completely relaxed).

**How do I overcome Needle Phobia?** Some kids and teens are able to get through pokes with distractions and rewards to motivate them. If this isn't enough because the fear response just too big, you can overcome this fear through BRAVE PRACTICE (also called "exposure"). This practice involves practicing facing the situation you fear (like getting a shot) to re-train your brain's fear response by learning through experience that needles aren't so bad.

Check out the box below for examples of things you can do to begin re-training your brain. You can start easy and move slowly to harder ones when you feel ready. Or, you can speed things up by doing harder things. Try to stick with each activity until you notice that it gets easier to approach the situation or complete the task. Don't stop if your anxiety is high or it can be hard to come back. Remember: anxiety cannot hurt you!

<u>Easier steps</u>	<u>Medium steps</u>	<u>Challenging steps</u>
♡ Draw pictures of needles, blood or blood draws	♡ Place tourniquet on arm	♡ Watch a video of a shot (where the patient is calm)
♡ Watch positive videos about how vaccines work	♡ Wipe alcohol swab on arm	♡ Watch a video of a blood draw while holding your arm behind the screen
♡ Smell an alcohol swab	♡ Perform fake steps of a shot or blood draw on a family member	♡ Going through the steps of a shot in doctor's office
♡ Play with and hold a tourniquet and bandages	♡ Receive pretend shot with a dull item (e.g., finger, pencil)	♡ Getting a shot or blood draw
♡ Sit in lab waiting room for 10 minutes (no shot)	♡ Sit in a medical clinic room for 10 minutes (no shot)	
	♡ Use a needle to poke a piece of fruit, or extract juice	

**Rewards can help!** This is hard work! Planning a special reward for after you successfully get the shot or complete the procedure can help motivate you to do the hard task. It can also help to have a reward system for doing daily practice of some of the steps above, and not just for the final goal. Rewards for daily practice might be smaller (points to earn a larger prize) and rewards for the full shot/procedure might be larger.

**Tips for brave practice:** When you do brave practice, it can help to repeat the activity a few times to help you get used to it. Also, if you will need to get more than a handful of pokes per year, it might be helpful to even practice *watching* the shot to really conquer your anxiety, instead of relying on distractions.

**What about the actual medical visit?** Brave practice should reduce the level of anxiety during actual medical needle encounters, but anxiety can still ramp up unexpectedly during those visits. Here are some strategies that can help actual medical visits (vaccination, blood draw, etc.) go better. Check the box for any you want to try:

- Distract (like watch a video, have a conversation, listen to music)
- Give a choice between two options about the situation (do you want me to talk or not talk; do you want to sit on my lap or sit on your own).
- Providers can tell the youth what to expect and describe what they are doing (unless the youth prefers not to know).
- Do not physically hold the youth down unless it is a medical emergency. Better to leave without a shot and come back later, rather than create a terrifying memory that makes the next shot harder.
- Do not delay or draw out the procedure, as waiting can make anxiety grow.
- Medical providers and caregivers: Your body language and face should be calm and show you are confident the youth can handle this.
- Give validation and express confidence: "I know this is hard, and I know you can do it."
- Do not deny that there can be pain or discomfort.
- If pain is a concern, consider using a topical anesthetic (numbing cream) if available.
- Remind youth about rewards.
- Consider having a reward or treat immediately available.
- Remind the youth of past successes.
- The youth can prepare a helpful thought to remember, such as: "It may be painful and that lasts about 5 seconds."
- Other ideas:

**Here is a place you can record your brave practice activities.** It helps to practice daily so your brain can quickly learn not to be so afraid. You don't have to do every brave practice idea, just do enough so that you can get the poke. For each activity, practice you notice it getting easier and less scary.

What activity did I do?	How high did my anxiety get? (0-10)	What did I notice?	What was my reward?

**Will my needle phobia come back?** Sometimes, yes. Some people receive more medical care than others, so they get more practice overcoming their fear of needles. Other people only have to face their fear once a year so they get less practice and might feel more anxiety the next time. The good news? The same practice steps can help again if you notice the anxiety coming back!