

# Toddler Reactions to Health Care Settings or Medical Procedures

Toddlers (age 13 months to 3 1/2 years) often react with “stranger anxiety” when confronted with unfamiliar faces. Their fear can lead to defiant, negative behavior or temper tantrums. Toddlers often perceive pain as punishment and are more likely to actively resist during painful procedures.

As you prepare your toddler for a hospital stay or medical procedures, ask your health care provider to explain the procedure your child will undergo and to clarify your role. Ask about pain medicines that can be given before and if you can be present during the procedure.

A parent’s presence is the best source of comfort and support for children. Let toddlers know when you will be there. If you can’t be present, let them know when you will return. Talk with your children about procedures in general terms that they can understand. Using play medical kits and role playing medical procedures using a doll or stuffed animal will help them know what to expect.

## The following ideas will help your toddler cope:

### Sensory

### Thinking or Behavioral Distractions

### Imagery

Rapid rocking

Patting

Stroking

Nursery rhymes

Sucking on a pacifier

“Pat-a-cake”

Cuddling

Books (picture, pop-up)

Storytelling

Hold child on lap  
or shoulder

Puppets/dolls

Speak through a doll or stuffed animal

Bubble blowing

Music

Singing

Heat/ice pack

Pounding toys

Familiar blanket

Stuffed animal

Make An Appointment

**651-290-8707**

Refer a Patient

**651-325-2200**

This information is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care providers. If you have any questions, talk with your doctor or others on your health care team.

If you are a Gillette patient with urgent questions or concerns, please contact Telehealth Nursing at **651-229-3890**.