

Challenge by Choice: Encouraging Your Child's Independence

Education and fostering independence are an important part of what The Painted Turtle Medical Team does at camp. During the summer sessions, this starts at check-in, by encouraging the camper to participate in organizing their medications and talking about their procedures. Throughout the week, this takes on many different forms: talking about their medications, helping the cabin nurse set up for a procedure or learning a new skill such as self-infusion.

The following are some simple steps you and your child can take toward independence. This can be used when performing procedures, for example giving themselves an injection. This can also be used for many other things, such as learning about and taking medication. There is no timeline for moving to the next step – just make sure that both the caregiver and the child feel comfortable before moving on.

First, talk about why the procedure is important – talk about why you're doing it and why it needs to be done regularly. Understanding the 'why' is an important step in taking care of themselves. Also, be sure to talk about your goals and the child's goals, keeping in mind that the child may not be able to complete every step. Throughout the process it is helpful to use words that the child will understand and allow time for questions. And always make sure you and the child are washing your hands, before and after each procedure, and as needed in between!

Steps to Learning your Procedure:

1. Caregiver collects supplies for the procedure – talk through each item, teaching the correct names for each one and what they are used for. Caregiver will perform the procedure, talking through each step.
2. Caregiver collects supplies for the procedure, with the child's help – as the child names each item, the caregiver will place it in front of them. If the child forgets an item, give them time and encourage them to remember which item(s) were missed – for example, give them the hint of "this is what we use to clean your skin." Once all of the supplies are collected, the caregiver will perform the procedure, talking through each step.
3. Child collects the supplies for the procedure – if the child is missing any items, give them time and encourage them to remember which item they are forgetting. This can also be turned in to a fun game to get the child more involved in collecting the supplies. Once all of the supplies are collected, the caregiver will perform the procedure, talking through each step.
4. Child collects all supplies for the procedure. The caregiver will perform the procedure, while having the child talk them through each step. If the child forgets a step, again encourage them to remember by giving hints.
5. With the caregiver watching, the child collects all of the supplies and performs the procedure. This may occur in stages, with the child initially performing one step, and then next time multiple steps, until finally they may be able to perform every step. Once the child can perform the entire procedure, continue this with a caregiver present until the child feels comfortable.
6. The child performs the procedure independently. They may still need reminders of when the procedure needs to occur – eventually they can set an alarm on their watch or phone to help them remember.

We acknowledge that not every child will be able to take care of themselves or become fully independent. However, we believe that taking responsibility for and understanding your health care is an important step in becoming independent and moving into adulthood. Learning these skills can open a whole new world for children, such as being able to attend a sleepover or eventually live on their own. Simply reading through this handout is a great first step! We want you to know that every step you take, even if they seem small, is a huge step toward growth and independence and that deserves a big camp cheer of **YES! YES! YES!**

- The Painted Turtle Medical Team