



CENTRE FOR AUTISM
MIDDLETOWN

Supporting Medical/Clinical Appointments



Visiting a hospital, health centre or other clinical setting can create anxiety for an autistic child or young person. It is an unfamiliar environment with new and unexpected sensory input. There will also be uncertainty about what will happen or how long the wait time will be. Health professionals can support autistic children and young people by making simple modifications to the environment, routine and their style of communication.

Here are some tips which will help:

1. Take photographs of the environment, including the front door, the waiting area and the clinical room, along with photographs of the professionals who children and young people may meet during the appointment. Make these photographs accessible on your website or send out copies with the appointment letter.
2. Where possible, use a room close to the entrance so the child or young person does not have to navigate a lengthy walk to the clinical room.
3. Offer the use of a side entrance which may be less busy and closer to the clinical room.
4. Where possible, make parking available close to the entrance.
5. Offer the first or last appointment of the day when the waiting area will be less crowded.
6. Ideally, the first appointment of the day should be offered as this reduces the risk of a lengthy waiting time.
7. If possible, create a quiet or calm room where the child or young person can wait for their appointment.
8. Minimise the wall posters in the waiting area.
9. Reduce or remove background noises e.g. announcement systems, radio, music.
10. Provide calming objects and resources in the waiting area and clinical room.

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11. Inform the child and parent of the expected waiting time when they arrive.
12. Establish the person's communication needs and preferences prior to the appointment i.e. do they use an augmentative communication system?
13. As a general rule, minimise verbal language and ensure statements/instructions are clear and concise.
14. Allow additional processing time after giving an instruction or piece of information.
15. Use visual supports, where appropriate, to clarify instructions and statements.
16. Minimise unexpected interruptions during the appointment e.g. switch off pagers and phones.
17. At the start of the appointment, explain what is going to happen, and where appropriate, use a visual schedule to clarify.
18. Ensure the child or young person has a means of requesting a pause or a break during the appointment.
19. Be aware of indicators of stress and anxiety, and offer breaks as needed.
20. Ensure the child or young person feels comfortable using any supports they need e.g. wearing ear defenders, holding a weighted item, using a fidget toy.