



ThinkDIFFERENTLY.

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## Anderson Center Consulting Caregiver Strategies for Supporting an Individual with Special Needs in Receiving the COVID-19 Vaccine

### Preparation Helps:

Individuals with Autism and other special needs often find unfamiliar situations stressful, which can lead to increased behavioral challenges. Helping the individual know what to expect can increase the likelihood that the vaccine process will be less stressful.

- **Vaccine Social Story** – A social story is a tool to help prepare individuals for new experiences or explain new or challenging concepts.
  - Using a positive/reassuring tone, review the social story with the individual, starting a few days prior to the vaccine appointment when they are calm and relaxed. Use a positive/reassuring tone.
  
- **Become Familiar with the Site:** If possible, visit the site (in-person or virtually) where the individual will receive their vaccination as being familiar with the location may help reduce stress.
  - Being aware of where to park and how to enter the building may decrease or eliminate stress.
  - If you are not able to go inside, even driving the by the building is helpful.
  
- **Practice Relaxation Strategies:** If the individual is anxious about the vaccination or has a history of challenges with medical appointments or injections, practice relaxation strategies they will be able to use at the appointment.
  - **Deep Breathing:**
    - Have the individual take a deep breath in for a count of 5 and out for a count of 5.
    - Or have the individual slowly trace your fingers as they count each breath.
  - **Visualize and Recall:** Encourage the individual to close their eyes and visualize and remember a preferred place (i.e., beach, park).

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## The Appointment:

- **Share Information:** Share potential challenges and other important information with the staff at the vaccination site.
- **Bring Supports:** Make sure you have supports to make the individual as comfortable as possible during their appointment.
  - Be prepared to wait: Bring something to do during waiting periods, especially if the individual is unable to assist with paperwork.
  - Bring sensory supports if needed.
  - Assure the individual has any communication supports they use.
- **Use a Motivator:** Plan something preferred to look forward to after the appointment and as a reward for getting their vaccine (going for a walk, stopping for food, watching a movie, etc.).
  - Involve the individual in the process of selecting the activity by offering a few choices.
  - Use First/Then language to remind the individual of the preferred activity coming up after the appointment.
- **Use Distraction:** Keep the individual engaged in conversation about a preferred topic or with a preferred item when it is time for the vaccination to be administered.
- **Prompt Relaxation Strategies:** Guide the individual through the strategies you practiced.
- **Praise:** Praise the individual for all appropriate behavior during the process and be specific! Point out exactly what it is they are doing that you are praising.
  - “I know we have been here for a while, but you are doing waiting patiently!”, “Thank you for sitting so nicely as we wait.”, “Great job waiting for your turn.”

**Created by Anderson Center Consulting**

*For additional resources, visit Anderson Center for Autism’s Covid-19 Resources webpage at:  
[www.andersoncenterforautism.org/-/covid-19-resources](http://www.andersoncenterforautism.org/-/covid-19-resources)*

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