

# Let your Kids be Curious: Demystifying Medical Play

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## What is medical play?

Play that involves real medical materials and equipment (syringes, tubing, alcohol swabs, gloves, sterile dressing materials, ChloroPrep, IV catheter, stethoscope, etc).

- A safe and therapeutic way for children to explore, learn about, and play with real medical materials.
- Usually done with a Certified Child Life Specialist, but can also be done at home with a parent or adult. Materials are often laid out for children to explore freely and utilize on stuffed animals, dolls, or an adult.
- Meant to be child-directed, meaning the child leads the way on what they want to explore or how they want to play with the materials.

## Who should participate in medical play?

- All children! Even children who are fearful of medical equipment or materials would benefit from medical play.
- If your child appears uncomfortable seeing or touching certain things, start with less intense materials, such as band-aids, q-tips, and gloves. Leave the other items out in view and your child will show you when they are ready to explore them or learn more about them.
- Even adolescents enjoy medical play since it is a rare opportunity to explore materials in a way that does not involve the direct treatment of someone they love.

## How can you introduce medical play at home?

- Gather materials of choice: band-aids, q-tips, gloves, stethoscope, sterile dressing materials, old port-a-cath, plastic syringes, IV catheter, tubing, old g-tube, blood pressure cuff, pulse oximeter, medical tape, thermometer, or any other materials or equipment your child frequently sees you using). Materials like this can be purchased, saved from home use, or you can ask a clinic nurse if they have extra or expired materials they can give you to utilize at home for play purposes.
- Start by laying all materials out on a table and see what your child gravitates towards. Have dolls and stuffed animals readily available to practice on and let your child lead the way.
- After exploring and playing with materials, start asking open-ended questions about items your child is using to assess their understanding. For example: “I see you using a stethoscope on your bear. I wonder what that is for?” or “How does that g-tube help the bear stay healthy?”
- Set up a medical play session with a Certified Child Life Specialist, a child development expert and certified clinician that specializes in teaching and supporting children through medical experiences. If the hospital you are being treated at does not have a child life specialist, you can schedule a virtual session through Hearts Connected.



Bright Spot Network is proud to partner with Hearts Connected! If you are interested in learning more about medical play or ways to emotionally support your children during your treatment, check them out! Their national team of Certified Child Life Specialists offer parent support calls and video sessions for kids and teens to emotionally support, educate, and empower children and families through difficult circumstances.

To schedule a free consult, go to [www.heartsconnected.org/services](http://www.heartsconnected.org/services)