

Tips for Getting a Child's Best Behavior during Testing with the STAT

Who should be in the room? Ideally, the examiner (you), the parent and the child should be the only people in the room (except for the videotaped sessions). If the parent needs to bring the child's sibling(s), make sure the parent arranges for a second adult to come who can watch the sibling(s) during the session.

Will my exam room work? In most cases Yes, an exam room in your office will be adequate. Make sure all cabinet doors in the room are securely closed. You will need chairs for the parent and yourself (or an exam room stool), a small chair for the child and a small table or bench for presenting the toys. If the room is not carpeted, provide a 5 x 8 ft carpet for floor play. Remove any extraneous furniture before the child and parent arrive.

Pay attention to possible distractions. Remove any unnecessary items on counters. Make sure any window is covered with a venetian blind or similar covering to decrease/eliminate visual distractions from outside activities if possible. The biggest potential distraction is still the presence of a sibling. As commented above, when you schedule the appointment for the STAT, ask the parent to bring another adult to watch siblings or arrange for child care at home.

Ask parents if their child has any specific sensory issues. Some children are sensitive to very bright lights or fluorescent lighting. Use environmental light only, low lighting or incandescent lights when necessary. Some children are also very sensitive to certain types of sound, for example, babies crying, or will pay attention to and be distracted by low environmental sounds you and I would not typically notice. Schedule the exam in a quiet room and at a less busy time in the office if possible. In addition, some children are very sensitive to being touched. Plan to conduct the STAT before your physical exam and ask the parent to provide any necessary physical redirection of the child during the STAT itself.

Getting started. Have a few toys out (not from the STAT kit) for the child to play with and allow time for the child to warm-up to being in the room. Then begin the exam just as described in the STAT Test Protocol. "Place all test materials on the floor, preferably before the child enters the room. Sit down on the floor and encourage the child to sit down. Position yourself about 3-4 feet from the child." Ask the parent to sit to one side on a chair or the floor. Get the child's attention by showing the child the ball and saying, "Look, (child's name), here's the ball!" Then roll the ball to the child, etc. If the child shows no interest in the ball even after several trials, try rolling the car or truck. If the child continues to show no interest, present a different toy/test item that may be more engaging such as the bubbles.

What about children who resist being touched or are overly-active? Just as children come in all shapes and sizes, they also come with a variety of behavioral styles or temperaments. A child may be slow-to-warm-up but respond positively after 5-10 minutes in the room, or a child may be overly active and show little or no social engagement at any time. Here are some suggestions for two situations:

The slow-to-warm-up child. The slow-to-warm-up child may resist leaving the parent's side or lap. Typically the slow-to-warm-up child will seek contact and comforting from the parent, and may request to be picked up. He or she may maintain good eye contact with the examiner (to make sure what is going to happen next) but will passively or actively resist requests to participate with test materials. Go slowly and try to follow the child's lead when possible. Allow the child to adapt to the new surroundings. Initially let the child play with other toys in the exam room or a favorite toy from home. You may also use the bubbles item as a warm up. The balloon item may be frightening to some children. Avoid touching or close physical approach and avoid changing test materials rapidly, (a child may insist on keeping one toy but may agree to the toy resting on the table next to them so that you and they can move on to the next test item). Ask the parent to do any physical redirection such as encouraging a wandering child to re-engage with a test item on the floor or table. Try to match the volume and intensity of your response to the child's. Overly exuberant positive responses may be overwhelming.

Another strategy for children who are reluctant to interact with test materials is to have the parent sit right behind them on the floor with the child on her lap as needed. The most structured approach is to have the parent sit on a chair and place the child on her lap. Place a table (such as an adjustable Rifton table or a hospital side table) in front of them. Sit directly across and present test items on the table. This amount of physical separation at times is sufficient for the child to begin to respond to test items.

The overly-active child. Organize the STAT materials ahead of time so you can easily reach them. For example, put the balloon in one pocket and the noisemaker in the other. Keep the pace of presentation of test items brisk and animated to maintain the child's engagement. Allow the child to play with a favorite test item if you need to find/organize test materials so you don't lose the child's attention. The overly active child may not choose to sit on the floor next to the toys but prefer to wander about the room. If the child regularly returns to interact with test materials, allow him or her to wander about the room. If the child persists with wandering about the room with very brief interaction with any particular toy, you can try several different strategies to increase the child's attention to and interaction with test materials. First, ask the parent to sit on the floor right behind her child or as needed with the child on her lap. Now present the test items. If this is unsuccessful, ask the parent to place the child on the small chair and move the table up to enclose the child (position the chair with its back to the wall). A Rifton table with a cut-out works great for this. If necessary, ask the parent to sit next to the child. And finally if the child continually gets up from the small chair and table, ask the parent to sit on the adult chair and place the child on her lap. Move a table of the appropriate height in front of them and then present the test items.

Provide frequent positive reinforcement for compliance and direct interaction with test materials for all children. Try taking a brief break for children who have refusals or children with several physical refusals or tantrums. When you resume, try an item that may be more engaging to the child and return to the other item later. If a child has a persistent tantrum, take a break and then go back to a favorite test item.

Discussing the child's performance with the family. Let the parents know you need to score the exam but will review the results in detail when you meet with them and other team members in the near

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future. Validate the parent's concerns about specific behaviors if appropriate but also comment on the child's strengths or the encouraging skills you observed.

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