

MAKING THE MOST OF DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENTS

Being prepared when you go with your child to a doctor's appointment is important to get the most out of your visit. Family Voices of Wisconsin recommends the following for making the most of doctor's appointments for your child with special health care needs and/or disabilities:

Before the Appointment:

Be ready to discuss your child's condition with facts or specific examples of your concerns. Ideally, have these concerns in writing. Your time and the doctor's time are valuable. If you go to the medical visit prepared, it will be more satisfying for both of you.

Keep a journal: Write down your observations of behavior, illness, temperatures, eating habits or anything else that your doctor may need to know regarding your child's diagnosis or health.

Keep medical records: You have the right to copies of your child's medical records. Keep your own records of tests, procedures, and their results.

Write out questions: Do not hesitate to ask questions and do not be embarrassed to ask for clarification when you don't understand something the doctor says.

Prepare your child: Tell your child what to expect, who you will be seeing and why, and what tests may be done. Take comfort items along on the appointment.

During the Appointment

Do your part: Work at understanding - listen and take notes. You cannot control how well another person will listen, but you can make sure you are doing your part.

Gain an understanding: Ask the doctor to explain the care or treatment plan and put it in writing. Repeat the care plan back to the doctor as you understand it.

Set time limits: In your written plans, state when you understand something is to be done and follow up on it. Set up a specific time to meet with the doctor to receive test results or discuss what a specialist has suggested.

Ask questions: If you are not clear or uncomfortable about a diagnosis or treatment, follow your instincts and ask your doctor, the nurse or other staff additional questions. Ask for information in writing and find out who to call if other questions come up.

Be organized: If the doctor does not have time to answer all of your questions or needs time to look into the matter, give the doctor a written list of questions and ask that he or she call you back at home to continue the discussion. Ask him to set up a time frame.

Think team effort: If you anticipate that there will be major discussion, diagnosis, or treatment plans developed at the appointment, consider taking a trusted friend or family member along so you can have someone else listening and taking notes.

After the Appointment

Have confidence: Ask for a second opinion if you feel it is needed.

Follow your instincts: If you are uncertain or uncomfortable about a diagnosis or treatment, follow your instincts and contact the physician to discuss your concerns.

Change doctors, if necessary: If, after several appointments, you do not feel that your concerns are being addressed, that the doctor is not listening to you and/or your child or that there are on-going problems with your doctor helping to coordinate your child's care, you may want to consider finding a new doctor. (For more information see the Family Voices fact sheet titled, "Finding the Right Doctor for Your Child with Special Health Care Needs and/or Disabilities." (go to www.familyvoicesofwisconsin.com)

This fact sheet is based on "Working With Doctors: A Parent's Guide to Navigating the Health System," by Carolyn Allshouse, Pacer Center, Minneapolis, MN

If you have questions or need help finding services contact the following organizations:

- [Regional Centers for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/cyshcn/index.htm) - www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/cyshcn/index.htm
- [WellBadger Resource Center](http://wellbadger.org) at wellbadger.org or 1-800-642-7837