Preparing Your Child for an MRI Scan

Children handle MRIs in very different ways. Some are excited and interested and some are a little nervous. Here we outline different plans depending on your child’s age, but you know your child best so choose a plan that you think will work best for your child, regardless of their age. For example, a more anxious child may do better with a plan for a younger age range. Remember, the more preparation you can do with your child, the better he or she is likely to do during the scan.

**After talking to us on the phone for the first time:**

* Start talking to your child about the scan (explain to them what an MRI is, when they will be doing it, and what they will be doing in the MRI) and ask them if they have any questions about it. Are they comfortable in enclosed spaces?
  + Please let US know if your child does seem nervous or asks many questions. Encourage them to ask us questions during the sessions.
* Talk about in positive terms, but please make sure to be attune to their concerns and try to alleviate them. If your child does show anxiety, please go to our website (<https://cohenlab.web.unc.edu/participate/)> and show them our MRI video. If you and your child decide that it is okay to proceed after watching the video, then we can move on to scheduling.

**After behavioral day:**

* Ask your child if they are sure they want to keep continuing. Ask them about any concerns or anxiety they may have.
  + If your child seems uncomfortable or anxious, do not push them to go through the scanning sessions. Please let us know right away. Children who are anxious about the actual scan days after going through the mock scan usually do not perform well. This is for their protection and comfort.
* Play the Statue Game:
  + Go under a table or chair and lie flat on their back
  + Tell them to stat as still as possible
  + Do this starting at 1 minute and then increase to 5 minutes
  + Play sample MRI sounds - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GZvd_4ot04>
* Answer questions that your child may have about MRI scans:
  + How long will it take?
    - You will be doing two scans for about an hour each, which is about the length of a movie in total.
  + What will I be doing?
    - You will be watching a short abstract movie and play the sports ball task you practiced in the mock scanner!
  + Will it hurt?
    - No. You will lie down on the soft table and try to be as still as possible. The researchers will put pillows around your head to keep your head still and cover you with a sheet if you feel cold. When you are ready, the bed you are lying on will slide slowly into the scanner tunnel, which will remain open on both ends.
  + Do I wear my own clothes?
    - No, you will take off your outer clothing (you can keep your undergarments on) and put on some cool scrubs!
  + What if I get scared?
    - That’s OK. The person across the window in the scanner room can see you and hear everything you say. So you are never alone! They can also have one of them in there with you.
  + Is it loud?
    - Yes, it sounds like a train or a lawn mower is right outside of your bedroom window, but you will be given earplugs so the sound will not be as loud. The sound is only made when the scanner is taking pictures.

**Before Scan**

* Make sure they have a good meal beforehand, but not too much to drink since they will not be able to go to the bathroom for an hour while in the scanner
* Remove all things metal from them
* Bring a favorite blanket from home if helpful!