

# A GUIDE TO MEDICAL PLAY



Hi, I'm Cozy the Cat!  
I'll be with you every step of the way.



## *How Can Medical Play Help?*

It is natural for any child to be fearful of new experiences and strange environments. For children with cancer, the hospital can quickly become a scary, confusing place that they associate with pain and sickness. Because kids can't fight cancer alone, parents and healthcare professionals need to use a wide range of tools to help them.

*One of the strongest fears children exhibit is*  
***fear of the unknown.***

ACCO's Medical Play Kit is a valuable tool for parents and healthcare professionals. This kid-friendly kit facilitates a dialogue with children and creates a bridge between hospital and home by demystifying some of the treatment procedures. By allowing children to become more familiar with the medical devices found in the medical play kit, they become more mentally prepared for what they will encounter during upcoming tests and treatments, lessening the fear of the unknown.





## *Medical Play Kit Contents*

**Stethoscope:** Allows the child to listen to their own heart and lungs, or to practice listening to the hearts and lungs of their “patients” (such as Cozy or family members).

**Thermometer:** With this, children can pretend to take their own temperature or practice on others.

**Arm Board:** Similar to what children have when they give blood or have IVs inserted.

**Rubber Gloves and Face Masks:** In a hospital setting, these can be very disconcerting to a child. By playing with these items and wearing the soft masks with Cozy cat nose and whiskers, these formerly frightening pieces of medical gear become familiar and non-threatening.

**Self-adherent Wrap Tape:** Closely resembles the medical wrap used to help hold the child's arm to the board, or to wrap the child's arm after giving blood or having an IV placed.

**Medical Tape:** Used to wrap up boo-boo's or to protect areas where children have had biopsies or surgeries.

**Travel Pill Case:** For organizing oral medication.

**Band-Aids:** The art on this box of band-aids was designed by a real cancer kid named Grace.

**Pill Bottle:** An easy-open bottle with a gold top.

**Tubing:** Closely simulates the central-line tubing children are given for their ports/central lines. Kids are better able to understand this potentially intimidating procedure by performing it on Cozy.

**Syringes (50cc and 5cc):** The small 5cc syringe is for use at the end of the central line tubing. The larger 50cc syringe can be used to simulate administration of other meds, perhaps even oral medications. The 50cc syringe also makes a great squirt gun!



# *Play Therapy is for All Ages*

There is no wrong way to do creative play therapy. The child or teen should take the lead and use the kit in the way that works best for them. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

## **Infants:**

- ♦ Play peek-a-boo with masks.
- ♦ Let the infant cuddle with Cozy while observing the items in use.
- ♦ Let the infant explore items through touch.



## **Toddlers:**

- ♦ Let Cozy be the patient as you demonstrate the items.
- ♦ Let the child take the role of doctor as they use the items on Cozy or family members.
- ♦ Use the items creatively for non-medical purposes, like using the bandaids as stickers.

## **Preschool:**

- ♦ Let the child take the role of doctor as they use the items on Cozy, family members, or self.
- ♦ Encourage the child to verbally express what is happening as they control and direct the play.
- ♦ Let the child use the items creatively, like drawing or coloring on the medical tape.



## School Age:

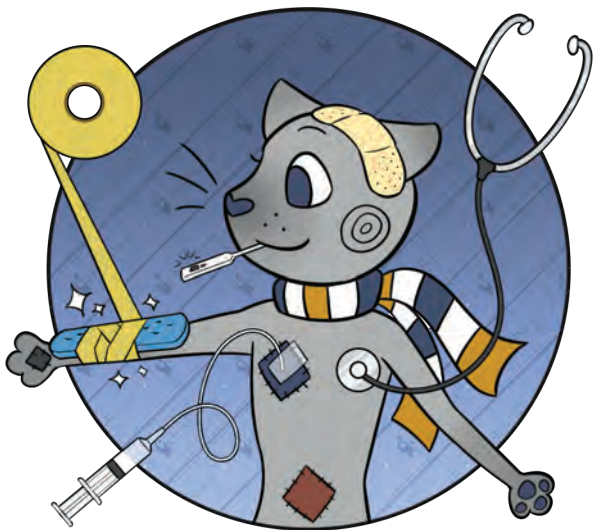
- ◆ Encourage the child to talk about each item and how it works.
- ◆ Let the child explore the function of each item.
- ◆ Let the child direct the play and the conversation.
- ◆ Use the syringes as squirt guns.

## Adolescents:

- ◆ No one is too old for the syringe squirt gun!
- ◆ Decorate personal effects with the medical tape or bandaids.
- ◆ Encourage the teen to explain the items to parents or siblings, taking the role of doctor and educator.

## Parents too!

- ◆ Some of these items might be new for you as well. It's okay to take a moment to examine them.
- ◆ Don't forget, adults also experience fear of the unknown.
- ◆ Participating in therapy play with your child can make both of you more comfortable.



## *Cozy the Companion*

Kids can test out their Medical Play Kit supplies on Cozy the Port-a-Cat: the soft, snugly stuffed animal that serves as both a teaching tool and a companion for children.

Cozy is there before treatment, during treatment, and after treatment, providing companionship and comfort for every step of the journey. Available for free to all children with cancer, Cozy has strategically placed patches that represent port access, bone marrow aspirate, spinal tap, gastronomy tube, and a hand IV. If children are nervous or unsure about a treatment, Cozy can have the procedure first to show them how it works.

# *Emotional Expression*

It may be helpful to let your child play with Cozy and the Medical Play Kit alone, without their behavior being guided in any way. By observing how they chose to interact with the objects, you can gain a fuller understanding of what your child is thinking and feeling.

Playing at home in a familiar environment, children can express things that they may not feel comfortable expressing in a hospital setting. Allowing your child to freely express emotions — even difficult emotions like anger — can help them process these emotions.

Insights into a child's thoughts and feelings can help both parents and health professionals provide better care. This is a complicated and difficult time for a child, full of new and upsetting emotions and physical feelings. Your child might need a little help communicating what all those feelings are.



*Gaining a sense of control is critical to easing anxiety.*

Talking with your child and participating in medical play will help them feel less stressed when visiting the hospital. Identifying which procedures cause the most anxiety allows you to address those fears with your child. Don't be afraid to seek guidance from a trained health professional if you don't have all the answers.





## *Play Therapy is for the Whole Family*

Including siblings in play can help them as well. Siblings can struggle to understand what is happening to their brother or sister in the hospital. The Medical Play Kit allows them to be involved and gives them a sense of control and agency. This also creates a space where siblings can express their feelings and fears.

**Notes:**



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This resource was developed by The American Childhood Cancer Organization to educate, support, and comfort children with cancer.

The American Childhood Cancer Organization was founded in 1970 by parents of children and adolescents diagnosed with cancer. Ever since then, ACCO has been supporting research, raising awareness, shaping policy, and providing educational resources and programs to kids with cancer, survivors, and their families.

...because kids can't fight cancer alone!®



[acco.org](http://acco.org)

