

BRIEF INTERVENTIONS: ANXIETY- DESENSITIZATION FOR THE PHOBIC CHILD

BI-PED PROJECT (BRIEF INTERVENTIONS: PEDIATRICS)

Emotional Health Committee Maryland Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics

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Appendix 5

Desensitization:

Some children have phobias that interfere with normal functioning. For some children a neighbor's pet or a visit to the doctor's office can provoke anxiety. Desensitization is a step by step approach to getting a child to deal with anxiety.

For example, in the case of a child who is afraid of their neighbor's fenced dog, one might desensitize the child using the following sequence:

- **Looking at pictures of dogs**
- **Going outside and observing the dog from a distance**
- **Teaching the child to read the dog's mood (e.g. wagging tail is friendly; growling means stay away)**
- **Going outside and gradually moving closer to the yard that contains the dog**
- **Petting a friendly dog**
- **Petting the neighbor's dog through the fence with an adult near by**
- **Petting the dog in the yard with an adult near by**

In the case of a child who is extremely afraid of injections, one might desensitize the child using the following sequence;

- **Reading about a child going to the doctor's office**
- **Talking to peers who have received vaccines**
- **Visiting the doctor's office and playing in the waiting room**
- **Visiting the doctor's office and being examined without an injection**
- **Visiting the doctor's office and pretending to receive a vaccine**
- **Returning to receive an actual vaccine**

