

Addressing Health Equity by Developing a Sensory Friendly Immunization Clinic Space

Project Description:

The purpose of this project was to improve the immunization experience for individuals with disabilities. There are currently 491 children in Henry County schools with an IEP according to the AEA. While most children do not like vaccines, we have many regular families that have children with various disabilities that especially struggle. We spoke to several parents of children with disabilities and they all shared that their child benefits from sensory aids in other health care settings. Suggestions included weighted lap blankets, a sound machine that also plays music, fidget toys, and a visual guide to help kids know what to expect.

After successfully applying for a grant through the University of Iowa's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, we began to implement strategies to improve the space with visual, audio, and tactile aids for both children and adults. We had a local artist design an eye catching but calming underwater scene on two walls in our immunization room. She even painted band-aids on some of the animals to give kids something to search for in the mural. We had our lights changed to dimmable and added a sound machine. We purchased weighted lap pads, fidget spinners and a soft vibrating ball to hug. We added a visual guide that shows the immunization process step by step. We were also able to purchase calming artwork and light filters for the waiting room and a large activity cube for young children and wipeable activity lap pads for older children to distract them from their anxiety while waiting for their shots. We developed a policy and updated our questionnaire to better serve someone with special needs.



Mural painted by Annie Guldberg

Success Story:

All of these enhancements have been well received and appreciated in the short time they have been done. Parents have expressed their gratitude for the distractions to help alleviate anxiety and have shared that their experience was much better than they had anticipated based on the past. In one instance, a mom of a 5 year old brought her child in for shots. She expressed that the child usually throws a tantrum and has an awful experience while getting shots. She checked the box on our questionnaire to indicate that the child would benefit from sensory aids. The nurse dimmed the lights, turned on the sound machine, and brought out a weighted lap blanket. When the mom and child came into the immunization room the nurse helped the child relax by pointing out the sea creatures that were painted in the mural on the wall. She also used the checklist we found to review step by step what to expect from the experience with the child. Then with the mural and lap blanket helping to distract the child she quickly and successfully gave the vaccinations with minimal crying or struggling. The mom was so relieved and impressed with how smooth the experience was that she initially left the clinic without asking for a copy of the immunization record. She came back and again repeated how smooth things went and how much better of an experience both the child and mom had.

Additional photos with permission to use:

