

Universal Protocol for Sheltering (*personalized*)

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It's important to emphasize that the Universal Protocol is intended to keep everyone safe for now. It's not a treatment program (i.e., it does not focus on teaching your child skills). Treatment programs are typically most successful when conducted at calm, stable times. A stressful moment, such as the moment when you need to get to a shelter, is not a good time to try to teach essential skills.

The following are ideas for how one might personalize the protocol to address inflexible safety-related tasks required during times of instability.

Make the shelter or other safety-related location as appealing to your child as possible.

1. Show continuous positive regard and empathy.
 - a. Appear calm, confident, and caring at all times
 - b. Try your best to be available to your child and focused on them
 - c. Provide non-judgmental listening (restate assertions and declarations) and be truthful when answering questions

2. Enrich the environment
 - a. Ensure multiple, preferred, and/or generally liked activities are available, such as:
 - i. Books, games, electronics, ...
[Consider creating a bag of items, activities, and foods—whatever you can access and as many as possible—that you can bring with you and make freely available to your child in the shelter]
 - b. Make these types of attention and interactions available to the child:
 - ii. ...

3. Follow your child's lead to the extent possible (e.g., let the child decide how much information to provide them)
 - a. Allow your child to wander and explore within non-dangerous boundaries
 - b. Answer questions asked by your child truthfully, even if they are repetitive
 - c. The child will attempt to lead with these forms of communication:
 - i. ...
 - ii. ...
 - d. Please immediately honor these requests whenever possible:
 - i. ...
 - ii. ...
 - e. Hold and comfort if showing signs of being distressed, especially if they are crying

Limit demands/expectations; focus on getting to and staying in the shelter.

4. Limit non-essential demands. When you need to go to the shelter or other safe location, make that the *only* demand (e.g., don't try to teach or promote independence; don't put any other expectations on your child—only that they go to and stay in the shelter).
 - a. Limit instructions in general
 - b. Limit questions unless following child's conversational lead or if questions are preferred by the child
 - c. Do not attempt to limit or redirect motor, object, or vocal stereotypy
 - d. Be tolerant of regression of language, play, or self-help skills (e.g., toileting skills); i.e., provide the support needed but don't attempt to reteach the skills

Consider strategies for making the expectation to go to the shelter and remain there less aversive.

5. Guide your child to the shelter using these strategies (consider preferred level of support):
 - a. ...
 - b. ...
 - c. ...

(e.g., offer choices—such as of things to take along, how to walk there, etc.; use non-directive prompting; show your child the bag you’ve prepared and let them look at it as you walk; have a *thing* not a person deliver the news that you have to go to the shelter—such as a small battery-powered light that you only turn on when it’s time to go to the shelter—point to it and say “the light is on, it’s time to go” and bring it with you)
6. Once in the shelter, establish a routine
 - a. Arrival routine:
 - b. Remain in place routine:
7. Once in the shelter, try to let *things* not people deliver the news that your child cannot leave.
 - a. If your child wants to leave but the doors are locked, let him try the doors rather than telling him he can’t leave. (Sometimes that message is easier to accept from a locked door than a person.)
 - b. If you have a signal, like a small light that you brought with you, keep it visible to your child the whole time. When it’s time to leave the shelter, turn the light off and tell him “The light is off, we can leave.” (Again, the goal is to show your child that leaving is controlled by the light being on or off—it’s not your decision and your child therefore can’t change your mind no matter how he behaves.)
 - c. Don’t talk about leaving unless your child brings it up. If he is content or otherwise busy, don’t mention the light or the doors. Engage with him on whatever he is interested in.
8. Say yes when you can and gently deny when you have to do so. In other words, reinforce the following behaviors immediately when possible:
 - a. Communication:
 - b. Precursors to Problem Behavior (i.e., indicator responses):
 - c. Problem Behavior:

By doing these things following these behaviors:

- a. ...
- b. ...
- c. ...
- d. ...