



## Rehearsal Guide

# Gynecology Exam

*Preparing someone with intellectual disability/autism (ID/A) to successfully complete a gynecology exam*

## Introduction for Caregivers

A rehearsal guide contains realistic pictures, concrete ideas, and clear, brief instructions for guiding a person through what can be expected in a specific situation. It includes helpful suggestions for caregivers to follow to make the experience meaningful for the person and increase the likelihood of a successful outcome. This approach is beneficial when supporting people with intellectual disability/autism (ID/A) who are anxious about situations such as doctors' appointments, hospitalizations, and medical testing.

A rehearsal guide provides opportunities for the caregiver to assist the person to learn about a specific situation. It contains information on what is needed and why and explains exactly what can be expected. Such a guide is most effective when it is person-centered and used in conjunction with discussion to allow exploration of specific areas of concern. It can be a powerful tool when used as intended.

The expected result is that the person will then experience the situation in a way that supports health and well-being by being prepared and knowing what to expect. The guide can be used at all stages of the situation to facilitate a positive end result.

Thank you for taking the time to use this tool to work with self-advocates to improve their health outcomes.

## How to Use This Rehearsal Guide

For best results, begin to review this rehearsal guide with the person prior to the day of the appointment. Sometimes it will help to review this material with an individual several days or weeks before an appointment; other times, it may be better to wait to review this material until just before the procedure is to take place, perhaps the day before or the morning of the procedure. Together with the individual, determine which will best suit the individual's needs and abilities in understanding the information provided; however, it is important not to wait until 5 minutes before a procedure to introduce this guide to an individual. Give the individual enough time in advance to become familiar with the procedure based on the pictures and information contained on each page and with the individual's abilities in mind.

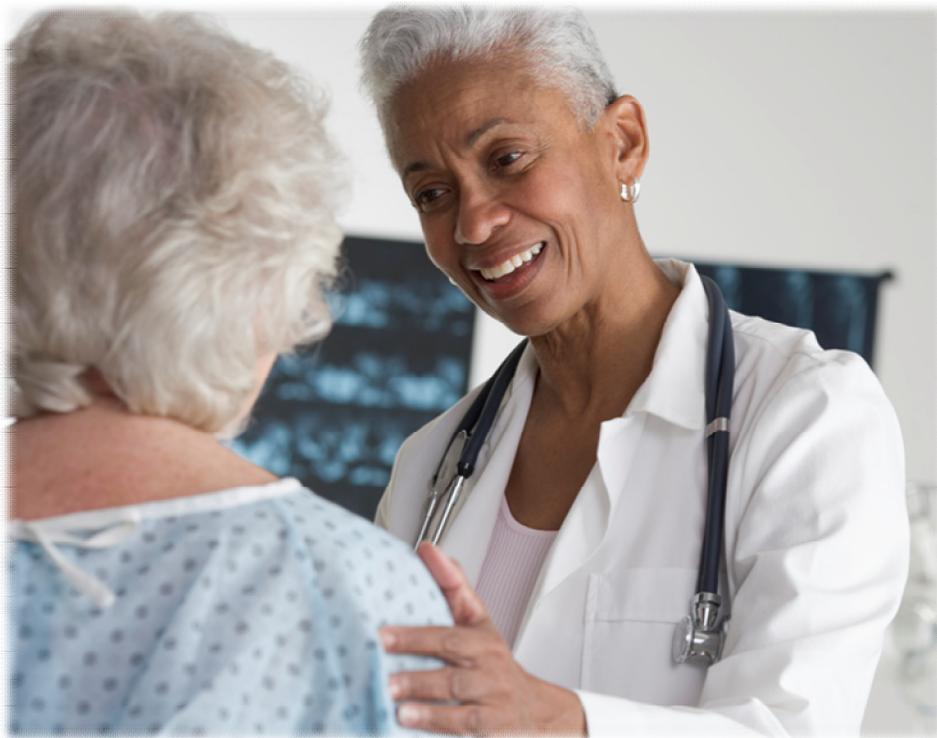
It is best to review this guide slowly and to focus on one idea/page at a time, allowing the person to talk and/or ask questions after each idea/page is presented. A caregiver may want to share personal experiences related to having this procedure done but be sure to do so in a positive manner, depicting a positive outcome.

## For Best Practices

- ✓ Allot time to review this material when the individual is alert and interested in doing so.
- ✓ Ensure that the setting is free from distraction. Based on the individual's attention span, it may be best to review one page at a time, rather than reviewing an entire guide in one sitting.
- ✓ Explain each picture and practice the suggested exercises with the individual, such as deep breathing, as they appear throughout the guide.
- ✓ On the day of the procedure, take this guide along to continue rehearsing the various steps involved in the procedure. Review each page step by step.
- ✓ Remain positive, calm, and upbeat.
- ✓ Remember to offer positive reinforcement throughout the procedure. If the procedure is not able to be completed, focus on positive aspects. If the individual seems upset, talk about it later when they are calm to find out how they felt and what could be changed or improved to have a better outcome the next time.

# A Specialist Doctor

People with female body parts see a doctor called a gynecologist. This doctor checks female body parts to make sure they are healthy. This doctor knows that feeling worried about this type of examination is common, so they will help you get through it.



# Why See a Gynecologist?

Different doctors do different things. This doctor checks your female body parts just like your PCP checks your heart and lungs to make sure they are healthy.

This doctor knows all about female body parts and will be able to answer any of your questions. The doctor will tell you what is going to happen next before doing anything.

It is important to relax and listen to the doctor.



**Note to Caregiver:** An individual may use unique words for intimate body parts, menstrual cycle, sexual activity, or discomfort. Inform the doctor of these terms prior to the exam to help facilitate better communication.

# Going to the Doctor

*(Name of individual)*, you have an appointment with the gynecology doctor on *(Date of appointment)*.

People with female body parts get gynecology exams to stay healthy.

*(Name of caregiver)*, will go with you and may stay with you during the exam, if you like.

This exam will take place at *(Name of location)*



**Note to Caregiver:** Contact the doctor's office in advance to assure that a female caregiver will be permitted to remain in the room while the exam is taking place.

## In the Waiting Room

When you first get to your appointment, you will have to wait until someone calls your name to be seen by the doctor or nurse practitioner.

*(Name of caregiver)* will stay in the waiting room with you.

You may be given paperwork to complete while waiting. You may answer questions or ask a caregiver to help you.

You might want to take a favorite book along to read or some of your favorite music to listen to on your headphones while you wait.



# When Your Name is Called

There will be nurses who will talk with you about what you need to do for the exam. They are friendly and will help you.

A nurse may check your blood pressure and your weight.



**Note to Caregiver:** Reassure the individual that the exam room is private. Be patient and use a calm, reassuring tone while assisting the individual.

# Changing Into a Patient Gown

The nurse will take you to a room and ask you to take off your clothes and put on a patient gown before the exam.

It is okay to listen to these people. *(Name of caregiver)* will be there to assist you if needed.



**Note to Caregiver:** Reassure the individual that the exam room is private. Be patient and use a calm, reassuring tone while assisting the individual.

# The Exam Room

The room where the doctor will see you has a special table that helps you be in the right position for the examination. You will be asked to put your feet into stirrups at the end of the examining table and move your bottom to the edge of the table. The doctor will help you get into the right position.



**Note to Caregiver:** *If you choose to discuss a personal experience regarding gynecology exam, keep the tone upbeat and positive.*

# Medical History

The doctor will ask you some questions. If you do not know the answers or do not feel comfortable answering these questions, (Name of caregiver) will be with you and will help you.



**Note to Caregiver:** An individual may use unique words for intimate body parts, menstrual cycle, sexual activity, or discomfort. Inform the doctor of these terms prior to the exam to help facilitate better communication.

# Checking Your Private Parts

After the doctor speaks with you, the doctor will check your breasts to make sure they are healthy. This will not hurt. Remember, *(Name of caregiver)* will be in the room with you the whole time.

The doctor will gently touch you to make sure there are no lumps in your breasts or under your arms. It is okay to laugh if this tickles you.

The doctor can teach you how to do this yourself so you can check your breasts every month to make sure they are healthy.



# Getting Ready for the Examination

Now the doctor will ask you to put your feet into the stirrups and move to the end of the table. This position helps the doctor see your female body parts very well.

Some people feel nervous about having someone touch their bodies. This is OK. *(Name of caregiver)* will be right there in the room with you, if that makes you feel more comfortable. The doctor is only making sure your female body parts are healthy.



**Note to Caregiver:** Offer the individual praise and encouragement as you explain the following steps.

# Checking Your Outside Female Body Parts

First, the doctor will look at your private parts that are on the outside of your body to make sure they are healthy. The doctor will touch them very gently to make sure they are okay.

Let's practice deep breathing. This will help you to relax.

*(Name of caregiver)* will hold your hand too, if you want.



**Note to Caregiver:** Practice deep breathing with the individual. Encourage the individual to take slow, deep breaths with you now and as needed during the exam. This may be a good time to offer to hold the individual's hand to show support. Quiet conversation about a pleasant topic may be a welcome distraction. Continue to offer praise and encouragement as you explain the following steps.

# Checking Your Inside Female Body Parts

Now the doctor will look at your female body parts on the inside to make sure they are healthy too. A tool called a speculum is inserted into your female body parts so the doctor can see your cervix, or the end of your uterus. Sometimes the doctor does a test on the cervix to make sure it is healthy.

While the doctor is doing this examination inside your female body parts you might feel some pressure. This is normal. Try to relax and continue taking deep breaths.



Let's practice deep breathing again. This will help you relax. *(Name of caregiver)* will keep holding your hand if you want them to.

## Relax and Breathe!

The doctor may also place one hand on your stomach while feeling your private parts inside.

Deep breaths can help you relax, so let's practice deep breathing again.



**Note to Caregiver:** Practice deep breathing with the individual. Encourage the individual to take slow, deep breaths with you now and as needed during the exam.

# You are Doing Great!

When the doctor is done, the doctor or nurse will ask you to sit up. Then you can put your clothes back on.



After you are dressed, the doctor might want to talk to you and (*Name of caregiver*). This is so you can ask questions you might have about the exam and the doctor can tell you if medicine or other tests are needed.

**Note to Caregiver:** Offer the individual praise and encouragement for completing the exam.

# You Can Do It!

I know you always do the best you can!



**Note to Caregiver:** Take time to see how well the person understands what was presented. Ask some very brief questions such as, “Do you know what will happen when you go to see the doctor for this exam?” Revisit the story as often as needed to ensure the person understands and is prepared when the day of the doctor’s appointment arrives.

## References

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For additional information regarding this guide or any of our physical or behavioral health trainings, contact:

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