

Quick guide to helping donors with needle phobia

Needle phobia (trypanophobia) is a deep fear of needles in medical settings, which can have a significant physical, mental and/or emotional impact on a person^[1].

According to the Journal of Advanced Nursing^[2], 20–30% of young adults exhibit a fear of needles. As an apheresis clinician, you can help the donor through needle phobia by following some simple strategies.

How to help get the procedure started:

1. Identify needle phobia as early as possible.
2. Ask if the donor has a history of passing out during venous access.
3. Prepare the donor by telling them what to expect, to prevent any surprises.
4. Ensure the donor has eaten and is hydrated.
5. Use topical anesthetics as needed for IV placement.
6. Have a second person there to help distract or talk to the donor.
7. Stay calm, give the donor time and allow for breaks if needed.
8. Have the donor lay back during venous access to help them relax.
9. Explain all sounds beforehand that may be experienced throughout the procedure.

Managing needle phobia throughout the procedure:

- Encourage anxious donors to look away from the insertion site until gauze or a dressing is applied; providing an eye mask may help.
- When not actively assessing needle sites, keep the donor's arms covered throughout the procedure.
- If needed, obscure the tubing and machine with drapes.
- Redirect the donor's attention away from the procedure, providing something to preoccupy the donor.
- Stay calm and don't rush the donor through the donation process.

^[1,2] McLenon, J., Rogers, M. (2019). The fear of needles: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Journal of Advanced Nursing, 75(1): 30–42.
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30109720/>

Some indications a donor may have needle phobia include:

- Dizziness or fainting
- Panic attacks
- Nausea
- Increased heart rate
- Trembling or shaking
- Feeling sweaty or cold