

## **Preparing Your Child for Surgery** (Children's Hospital of Wisconsin)

Planning for your child's procedure or surgery can be stressful. Being well prepared can help you and your child feel less nervous about surgery. One way to help you learn what will happen is to write down questions ahead of time. Having your own questions answered will help you as you start to talk to your child.

It is important to help your child understand why surgery is needed. Children cope better if they know what's going to happen and why.

When preparing your child, information should be given:

- In a way your child will understand
- To help correct false thinking your child may have about the hospital
- To get rid of fears and feelings of guilt your child may have

Use the following tips to help your child:

### **Infants (0 to 12 months old)**

- Familiar objects and people are important to infants.
- Bring a favorite blanket, toy or pacifier.
- Bring your infants bottle or cup to use after the procedure.



### **Toddlers (1 to 3 years old)**

- Talk about the hospital one to two days before surgery.
- Let your child choose a favorite stuffed animal or toy to bring.
- Help explain what the staff will do before they touch your child.
- Help your child feel less afraid of the medical team. Let staff look at your ears or listen to the stuffed animal's heart first. This may help put your child at ease.

### **Preschoolers (3 to 5 years old)**

- Talk to about the hospital about three days before surgery
- Read books about the hospital together.
- Be honest and explain things in simple terms. Think about the words you use.
- Play is how preschoolers learn, so playing hospital or doctor is very helpful. Stuffed animals, dolls and medical kits can help you to learn what your child understands.



### **School-Age Children (5 to 12 years old)**

- Talk to your child about the hospital one to two weeks before surgery.
- Give your child time to ask questions and talk about concerns.
- Be honest. Reassure and encourage them to talk about what they are feeling.
- Explain what your child will see after the procedure such as stitches or bandages.
- Make sure your child understands. Have your child tell you what they think is going to happen.

## Teens (12 to 18 years old)

- Teenagers are learning independence and decision-making.
- Teens are concerned with body image, privacy and relationships with friends.
- Talk about what is going to happen. Encourage your teen to take part in decision-making.
- Be honest. Your child may be upset if they feel people are keeping secrets from them.
- Encourage your teen to ask the doctor or nurse questions.
- Respect your teen's need for privacy.



## What to tell other children in the family

Your other children may have questions. They may be worried and upset. How to help:

- Talk about the procedure. Use simple, honest language that they can understand.
- Explain where you will be and why it's important.
- Stick to structure and schedules with them as much as possible.

## The Day of Surgery

### Stay relaxed

Children notice how their parents react to a new situation. It is normal for you to be anxious about surgery, but it is important to not let your child see how you are feeling. If they see you are worried, they will be too. Children are surprisingly able to interpret body language, tone of voice and facial expressions. Nothing calms a child more than a confident parent.

### Offer distractions

Make a plan to distract your child until it's time to get ready for the procedure. If possible, pack a bag of new toys to keep them occupied. Keep the conversation upbeat and light; don't let them pick up on your anxiety.

### Work with the surgery team

The anesthesiologist and surgery team have your child's best interest in mind. Be open and honest with them so they can make the best decisions for your child. Remember that the anesthesiologist has experience with preparing children for surgery, so take your cues from him or her to keep your child calm.

### Child Life Specialists

Child Life Specialists are trained professionals. They have studied child development and how children react to health care settings. Child Life Specialists help make the hospital less stressful for patients and families. They can help ease the fear and worry your child and their siblings may have. They can also help your child understand and cope with being in the hospital.

Child life specialists are available to talk to you during your stay. If you would like to meet with a member of the child life team, please ask your nurse to have them paged.

**ALERT:** Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any concerns or if your child has special health care needs not covered by this information.

**This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.**