

Preparing your child for surgery (school age 6 - 12 years)



Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

You can help prepare your child for surgery. Preparing ahead of time can help:

- Calm your child's fears.
- Make recovery easier and faster.
- Calm you as you focus on him, on what to expect and on how to care for him afterwards.

What are some common fears of school age children?

Like all people, children are sometimes afraid of certain things. Some common fears for school-aged children include:

- Being away from school and friends
- Part of his body being damaged or injured
- Being away from you and other caregivers
- Pain or the possibility of pain
- Waking up during surgery
- Loss of control
- Thinking he is in the hospital as punishment
- Needles and shots
- Dying during surgery or not waking up after surgery

How can I help prepare my child for surgery?

This list of tips can help you when you talk with your child about surgery.

Talking with your child

- Tell your child about the surgery 1 to 2 weeks before it happens.
- Read books to your child about the hospital or surgery. Some options are:
 - *Rita Goes To the Hospital* by Martine Davison
 - *Alfred Goes To The Hospital* by Lawrence Balter
- Let your child know that there is a doctor whose **only** job is to make sure that he stays asleep during the whole procedure. This doctor is called an anesthesiologist. Also, let your child know that:
 - He will not feel anything while he is asleep.
 - The doctor will stop giving him the anesthesia (air or medicine that helps him stay asleep) when the surgery is done. After this, he will wake up.
- Make sure your child understands that his surgery is not a punishment. Help your child understand why he needs surgery.
- Let your child know that many other children have had the same type of surgery.
- Offer praise, positive reinforcement and support.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Preparing for surgery – school age, continued

Choosing your words

- Explain your child’s surgery in words that he can understand. Have your child explain back to you what will happen to make sure he understands.
- Instead of using the words “hurt” or “pain”, use words like “sore” or “achy”.
- If a medicine will burn, tell your child that it will feel “warm” or “different” instead.
- If your child may be sore, tell him that he will be able to have medicine to help him feel better.
- Explain how the surgery can help your child. For example, “After your arm is healed, you will be able to play basketball again.”
- Be honest. Avoid making promises you cannot keep, such as, “I promise it will not hurt.” Also, avoid giving false reasons for the hospital visit. Being truthful helps to build trust.

Visit the hospital

If possible, visit the hospital before the surgery.

- The Child Life department offers tours. A tour can help your child learn about the hospital.
- This can also help your child see the sights, sounds and events he will have the day of surgery.
- You and your child will have a chance to ask questions.

The surgery

- Give your child as many choices as possible, so he feels like he has some control. For example, ask him:
 - “Which movie do you want to bring?”
 - “Do you want to sit on your bed or in the chair while we wait?”
- Let your child know you will wait close by during his surgery and will see him as soon as he gets to his room.
- It is normal for some children to get angry, weepy or quiet in the hospital. He may act younger than his age for awhile. Be patient, and treat him as normally as possible.
- These behaviors usually improve after the stress of surgery has passed.

Take care of yourself

- Make sure that you know about your child’s surgery and know what to expect. This can help reduce your fears about it.
- Make sure that you, your child and your family are well-rested.
- Take care of yourself. Your child can sense and react to your stress level.

The Child Life department provides hospital tours for all children above the age of 3 years old.

- To arrange a tour at Egleston, please call 404-785-6325.
- To arrange a tour at Scottish Rite, please call 404-785-4286.

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