



Preparing Your Child for Surgery (School Age 6 -12 years)

Children's
of Alabama®

Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's health care team about specific care for 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.
 - Educate yourself on the surgical process and how to support your child through their recovery.

What are some common fears of school age children?

Like all people, children are sometimes afraid of certain things. The list below has some common fears for school-aged children.

- Being away from school and friends
- Being away from you and other caregivers
- Dying during surgery or not waking up after
- Waking up during surgery
- Thinking they are in the hospital as punishment
- Being in a strange place
- Pain or the possibility of pain
- Needles and shots
- Part of their body being damaged or injured

How Can I help prepare my child for surgery?

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

Talk with your child

- Tell your child about a week or two before surgery.
- Read Books to your child about the hospital or surgery.
 - *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 they stay asleep during the whole procedure. This doctor is called an anesthesiologist. Also let your child know that:
 - They will not feel anything while they are asleep.
 - The doctor will stop giving him the anesthesia (special medicine that helps them stay asleep) when surgery is done. After their surgery is finished, they will wake up.
- Offer praise, positive reinforcement and support.

Choosing your words

- Explain your child's surgery in words that they can understand. Have your child explain back to you what will happen to make sure they understand.
- Instead of using the words 'hurt' or 'pain', use words like 'sore' or 'achy'.
- Your child will be sore after surgery; tell them that they will be able to have medicine to help them feel better.
- Explain how the surgery can help in a way that your child can understand.
 - For example, "After the doctor fixes your heart, you will be able to play longer without getting tired or you will be able to run without getting tired".
- Be honest. Avoid making promises you can't keep, such as, "I promise it won't hurt." Also, avoid giving false reasons for the hospital visit. Being truthful helps to build trust.

Visit the hospital

- You and your child will visit the hospital for a pre-admission appointment where your child will have labs drawn, a chest x-ray, electrocardiogram (EKG) and a chance to meet and talk with their surgical team.
- You and your child will have a chance to ask questions.
- You can meet a Child Life specialist who will be able to explain the surgery in a developmentally appropriate way and help promote positive coping throughout their hospital stay.

The surgery

- Give your child as many choices as possible so they feel like they have some control. For example ask them:
 - Which toy or game do you want to bring with you?
 - Do you want to sit on your bed or in a chair while we wait?
- Let your child know you will wait close by during their surgery and will see them as soon as they get to their room.
- It is normal for some children to get angry, weepy or quiet in the hospital. They may revert to younger behaviors such as tantrums, bed wetting, or show signs of increased separation anxiety. Be patient and treat them as normal 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 pick up on and react to your stress level.

To arrange a tour please call your surgeon's office.

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