

Family Education Sheet

Preparing Your Child for Surgery



Boston Children's Hospital

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This family education sheet offers general guidelines to use for supporting your child before surgery and on the day of surgery. We understand that your child has their own needs and learning style. For additional support, please contact Child Life Services: (617) 355-6551 or childlife@childrens.harvard.edu.

Key points:

- You can help your child.
- It's OK to not have all the answers when talking with your child.
- You can reach out to Child Life Services for more help or information.

Why should I tell my child about their surgery?





- Establishes trust between you, your child, caregivers and the medical staff
- Helps your child be less afraid in the medical setting
- Gives your child accurate information, which helps with any misconceptions
- Identifies and addresses your child's specific concerns
- Knowledge helps your child feel a sense control over the situation





How can I talk to my child about their surgery?

- Start the conversation earlier in the day, not too close to bedtime, to allow your child time to process the information.
- Start with basic information and follow your child's lead. Every child is different with how much information is helpful.
- Use language/terms that are familiar to your child.
- It's OK for your child to feel nervous or worried. Knowing that you will be honest with them will allow them to work through these feelings with you.
- Remind them that surgery is to help their body grow strong and healthy.
- Validate your child's feelings.
- Offer realistic choices when possible.
- It's OK to not know/have all of the answers.
- Check in with your child to see what they understand/ask if they any questions.
- Identify and practice coping strategies before the surgery, like deep breathing, guided imagery or distraction.
- Have your child help pack for the hospital to give them a sense of control. Encourage them to bring familiar/favorite toys, comfort items, fidgets or activities.

Don't forget that you are your child's greatest support. Make sure that you are taking care of your needs on day of surgery (eating/drinking) so that you can be there to support your child.

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	General Developmental Considerations	How to Prepare	Coping/Support on Day of Surgery
<p>Infant/Toddler</p>  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns about separation from a caregiver May be afraid of the medical staff and environment May not understand reason for the hospital visit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Books/videos about the hospital Books about feelings Use medical play with a doctor's kit and stuffed animal/doll as a way for your child to express their feelings and get comfortable with medical equipment Not able to understand the concept of time – tell them 1 or 2 days in advance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try your best to present as calm even if your child gets fussy. This is a normal response for children in the medical setting Use familiar items from home, like comfort items, toys or a sippy cup for after surgery Your touch and voice are the most calming and reassuring thing you can give Remind your child that surgery is to help them, that you will be with them and that hospital staff is there to help Read books/sing together so your child can hear your voice Play together to help normalize the experience Offer medical play
<p>Pre-school</p>  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worried about what might happen to their body May think that surgery is a punishment for something that they did Magical thinking may have them picturing something much worse than reality (“put to sleep” vs. “get sleepy medicine”) May want to be independent and do things on their own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Books/videos about the hospital Books about feelings Use medical play with a doctor's kit and stuffed animal/doll as a way for your child to express their feelings and get comfortable with medical equipment Boston Children's My Hospital Story or procedure-specific book (ask Child Life Services) Begin conversation up to 3 – 4 days in advance and at least a full day before 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try your best to present as calm even if your child gets fussy. This is a normal response for children in the medical setting Your touch and voice are the most calming and reassuring thing you can give Remind your child that surgery is to help their body stay strong and healthy and that the hospital staff is there to help Allow your child to get familiar with medical objects before they're used, like touching the stethoscope first or using it on yourself first Play together to help normalize the experience Offer medical play Be mindful of word choices (“It's time to take your medicine.” vs. “Do you want to take your medicine?”) Offer realistic choices (“Do you want your medicine in a cup or a syringe?”)

General Developmental Considerations	How to Prepare	Coping/Support on Day of Surgery
<p>School-age</p>   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information seekers and detail oriented Fears and worries around anesthesia Worried about what might happen to their body Concerns about pain Misconceptions often based on things seen on TV/movies or heard from others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide information about events at least 1 week before the surgery to give your child time to process information and plan/rehearse preferred coping strategies Boston Children's My Hospital Story or surgery-specific book (ask Child Life Services) Include concrete explanations of the affected area of the body and how the procedure will improve the condition If anesthesia is a concern, discuss how the anesthesia doctors are with them the entire surgery and that these doctors make sure they are safe and comfortable throughout the entire surgery Encourage your child to write down questions for the medical team Identify and practice coping strategies before the surgery, like deep breathing, guided imagery or distraction Use medical play with a doctor's kit and stuffed animal/doll as a way for your child to express their feelings and get comfortable with medical equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try your best to stay calm even if your child gets upset. This is a normal response for children in the medical setting Remind your child that surgery is to help their body stay strong and healthy and that the hospital staff is there to help Play together to help normalize the experience Offer medical play Be mindful of word choices ("It's time to take your medicine." vs. "Do you want to take your medicine?") Offer realistic choices ("Do you want your medicine in a cup or a syringe?")
<p>Adolescents</p>   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher level of understanding Becoming more independent Concerns surrounding body image or scars Need for privacy Might be scared/nervous/worried/upset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include your teen in planning for the surgery and hospital stay <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coping/diversional items to bring from home Timing/scheduling of surgery Supports for surgery, hospital stay and recovery Encourage your teen to prepare a list of questions for medical providers Allow your teen to decide how involved they would like to be in medical discussions Identify/practice coping strategies before the surgery, like deep breathing, guided imagery or distraction Boston Children's My Hospital Story or surgery-specific book (ask Child Life Services) Encourage them to connect with their friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to and validate your teen's feelings Allow them to have opportunities for control when possible Use coping strategies Respect your teen's need for privacy