

Here are some more ideas to help prepare your child using the packet of supplies from Child Life and Expressive Therapies.

- **Coloring Book:** describes a surgery experience.
 - Read it with your child.
 - Color with your child while talking about their expectations and concerns.
- **Surgical Hat:** worn by nurses and doctors in the operating room.
 - Place on dolls or stuffed animals.
 - Explain the hat's importance in keeping the operating room clean.
- **Surgical Mask:** worn by nurses and doctors in the operating room.
 - Play peek-a-boo with your child.
 - Reassure your child there is always a smile under the mask.
 - Explain that the surgical mask decreases the spread of germs.
- **Anesthesia Mask:** used to give medicine in the form of a special air that makes your child very sleepy.
 - Try the mask on a doll or stuffed animal.
 - Have your child practice blowing up a pretend balloon through the mask, encouraging nice slow, big breaths.
 - Talk about a pleasant dream that your child can think about while drifting off to sleep.

- **Cloth doll:** use for play by your child.
 - Have your child draw a face on the doll resembling feelings before surgery. Then draw another face on the other side, showing the feelings after surgery, thus giving you a chance to talk about the whole experience.
 - Have your child "act out" being a patient.

Adolescents

You can use similar methods with less play to prepare an adolescent. Your adolescent may take a more active role in the decision-making process of the surgical experience.

Collaboration between parents, nurses, and child life specialists is essential in preparing your child for surgery no matter what the age of the child. Children who are prepared for surgery show less anxiety, distress, and upset behavior. They are better able to cooperate, and their behavior after discharge is improved. It is important to prepare your child with all the necessary information since imagined events are more often upsetting than events that are known and understood. Always reassure your child that they will be fine and will return home again after surgery!



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Through a Child's Eyes

Preparing your child for surgery



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Having Surgery

Children often react emotionally to the prospect of surgery. Before coming in for surgery, your child needs to be prepared physically, intellectually, and emotionally for their individual surgery and hospital experience. A surgical experience can be approached in a positive manner if you and your child become informed and know what to expect. The experience will be more positive if your child's concerns and anxieties are discussed and understood, and your child is able to establish some familiarity with the medical staff associated with their care.

When to Begin Preparing a Child for Surgery

When your child is facing surgery, deciding when to give them information about the surgical experience should be based on your child's age and level of maturity. Your child needs time to think about information and ask questions, but too much advance preparation may create unnecessary worry. A general rule

of thumb is to begin home preparation of a two-year-old, 2 days before surgery; a three-year-old, 3 days before, and so on.

If your child is interested in a pre-admission surgery tour, it may be necessary for them to attend it within 2 weeks of their surgery date, due to scheduling. Nevertheless, home preparation is essential.

How to Start Preparing Your Child for Surgery

Attending a pre-admission surgery tour is strongly recommended when preparing your child for surgery. The tour is a key educational opportunity for children, as well as their families. During the tour, your child will meet the medical staff and become familiar with the environment and equipment. It also provides ample opportunity for you and your child to ask and answer questions.

Parents in Partnership Ease Anxieties

There are many ways in which you can assist in the process of preparing your child for an upcoming surgery. Depending upon your child's age, maturity, and development, some activities may need to be modified in order to be more effective. The following may help you with this process.

Helpful Hints

- Provide a simple explanation of what the surgery will correct. Many children fear a part of their body will be hurt or lost during an operation. Reassure them that the surgery will help them feel better.

- Children often have fears or misconceptions about their upcoming surgery. Asking questions and helping your child talk about what they are thinking, feeling, or experiencing will give you insight on how to best prepare your child.
- Answer your child's questions honestly and age-appropriately.
- Use words that are non-threatening, age-appropriate, and understandable for your child.

Avoid Using the Following:

Avoid: "Put you to sleep" (Like my cat was put to sleep?)

Suggested: "The sleep doctor will give you medicine through a mask that will help you go into a deep sleep. When the operation is over, the doctor will stop giving you the medicine and you will wake up."

Avoid: "Cut; open you up; slice; make a hole"

Suggested: "The doctor will make a small opening (as small as ...)"

Avoid: "Gas (Gasoline?)"

Suggested: "A special medicine that will make you sleepy."

Avoid: "As long as ..."

Suggested: "For less time than it takes you to ..."

Infants and Toddlers

Preparation for infants and toddlers is primarily parent-focused. If your child is older, a packet of supplies will be given to help them learn about the surgery.

On the day of surgery, feel free to bring a comfort item from home for your child, such as a stuffed animal or blanket.

Preschool and School-age Children

- Ask your child what they think will happen on the day of surgery.
- Have your child color a picture about their upcoming surgery and explain what it means.
- Discuss feelings, fears, and misconceptions. Explanations should be simple and brief. Make sure your child understands that they did **not** do anything wrong to deserve the surgery. Help your child understand that it is not because they had been bad and are being punished. Helping your child understand the need for surgery prevents guilt and shame.
- Using dolls, puppets, or stuffed animals, let your child "act out" what they think will happen. Parents should clear up obvious misconceptions.
- Using medical toys also can assist your child in "acting out" medical situations.
- Reading books from the library in regards to taking a trip to the hospital/clinic or having surgery can also help your child prepare for the event.
- Encourage your child to start a scrapbook; including everything they receive during their surgery experience and possibly taking pictures as some of the events take place.