

Preparing Your School-Age Child for Surgery

School-Age Children should be prepared a week or two before surgery (when possible) since preparation too far in advance can produce more anxiety. Recognizing what is stressful to your school-aged child while in the hospital can guide you in preparing him/her for the surgical experience. Common stressors and fears in the hospital may include the following:

- Being away from school and friends
- Thinking he/she is in the hospital because he/she is bad or punished
- Fear of body injury, mutilation and never being well again
- Loss of control, loss of your respect and love
- Fear of pain
- Fear of anesthesia
- Modesty concerns

How do I prepare my school-aged child for surgery?

- Contact the Child Life Specialist at 972.566.4735 to arrange a hospital tour and an appointment for a preparation session for your child before surgery. Touring the hospital before surgery can help your child see the sights, sounds, and events he/she will experience the day of surgery. The tour and preparation will help your child learn about the hospital and give him/her time to talk about concerns and questions.
- Make sure your child knows why he/she is having surgery in words he/she can understand.
- Have your child explain back to you what is going to happen in the hospital. School-aged children sometimes will listen carefully, but will not understand all that was said. This can help you to learn whether or not your child has a clear understanding of what lies ahead.
- Encourage your child's friends to visit the hospital, or to keep in touch with your child by telephone or with letters and cards.
- Learn as much as you can about your child's surgery. The more you know, the better you will be able to help explain things to your child.
- A family member should stay with your child as much as possible. Always tell your child when you are leaving, why, and when you will be back. If your child will remain in the hospital for several days, ask family and friends to call and visit often.
- Let your child know that it is acceptable to be afraid and to cry. Encourage him/her to ask questions of the physicians and nurses.
- When your child is stressed, they may start regressing and/or displaying new fears, such as being afraid of the dark. Give many compliments and hugs. Provide comfort holding when possible instead of using restraints during tests and procedures.

Helpful Books for you and your child:

- When Molly Was In The Hospital: A Book for Brothers and Sisters of Hospitalized byDebbie Duncan, Nina Ollikainen (Illustrator).
- Tubes in My Ears: My Trip to Hospital by Virginia Dooley and Miriam Katin &Mondo Publishing.
- Hospital Journal: A Kid's Guide to a Strange Place by Ann Banks
- How to Feel Better About Being in the Hospital: A Guide to Everything You Want to Know About Being in the Hospital But Are Afraid to Ask by Michael Sherman and Joan Wolfensberger
- This is a Hospital, Not a Zoo by R. Karim