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Preparing Children & Teens for Surgery



Medical Play

Infants and Toddlers

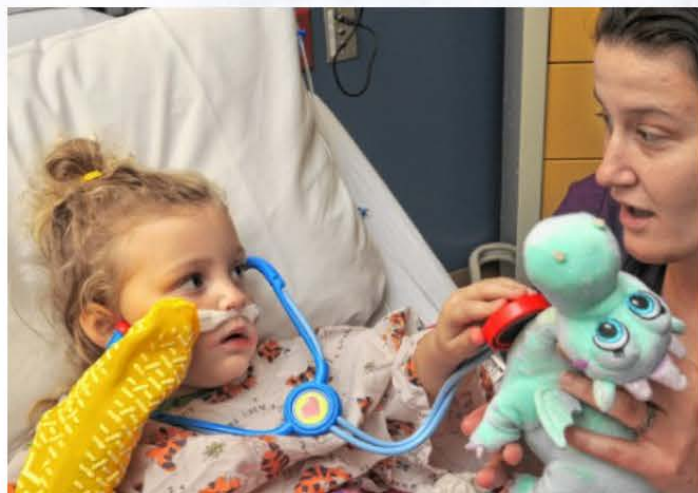
For infants and toddlers, the disruption in routine is difficult. This is also the age when separation anxiety runs high!

- Keep routines as consistent as possible.
- Bring familiar items from home (blanket, stuffed animal, favorite toy, family photos) to help your child feel safe.
- Reassure your child that you will be there with him/her – and when you have to be away while the doctor helps he/she with the special sleep medicine, you will be right there waiting when he/she wakes up.
- Offer lots of extra “snuggle” time with your child in the days leading up to the procedure. Just being there with your child can help relieve anxiety.

Preschoolers

At this age children are in the phase of “magical thinking,” meaning that children link things that are not connected. For example, it is easy for preschoolers to develop misconceptions – that something they did caused the surgery, or they did something bad and are being punished with surgery.

- Encourage them to express their feelings with a feelings chart or puppet play.
- Reassure your preschooler that the surgery has nothing to do with his/her behavior.
- Preschoolers need a little more time to process than toddlers. Start preparing your child a week before the surgery. Be honest and keep explanations simple.
- Use play, tell stories or read books to help your child process the idea of surgery and give him/her the opportunity to ask questions.



... More Medical Play



Preparation

Teenagers

Teens have many of the same fears as school-age children, but these worries may be more intense. A teen may worry about losing independence or about how the surgery may affect his/her body.

- Involve your teens early in the process and with the decision making. Make sure your teen feels heard and has an equal voice in deciding what will happen.
- Be honest. Teenagers deserve to understand the details. If they feel adults are lying to them, trust can be compromised and teens may become angry or uncooperative.
- Teens need more space than younger children. Respect their privacy and their choice to ask questions or not.
- Offer them ways to express their feelings. Suggest writing, drawing, or composing as a way to share what they are feeling.

School-Agers

School-aged children tend to worry about time away from friends, school, sports and other activities. They will cope better with more knowledge about the surgery.

- Children of this age need more time to prepare – at least one to two weeks. Give them concrete details about what will happen. Reassure them that there is a special doctor who gives them special sleep medicine so they will not feel any pain during the surgery. Explain that it is a different sleep than they have at home, they will not wake up during surgery and it is not the same as being “put to sleep” or “put down” like they may have experienced if they have ever had to “put down” a pet.
- Children this age are curious and want to learn. Try reading books about surgery and encourage your child to express his/her feelings and worries. They may have misconceptions about what will happen, so it is important to encourage your child to ask or write down any questions.
- Involving friends (such as planning for a friend to FaceTime or video call) can ease your child’s mind. Make sure to ask if this is something they’d like to do.

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