

Developmental Stage: Preschool (3-5 years)

# Getting Your Preschooler Ready for Surgery

Your child is having surgery and it's normal for you to feel nervous. When you feel prepared and calm, you can best help support and comfort your child before his/her surgery. This handout will go over when to tell your child about his/her surgery and common stressors your child might feel. It will also give you tips on how to get your child ready for surgery and offers a list of things to bring from home that can help your child feel more relaxed and comfortable.

## WHEN SHOULD I START TO GET MY CHILD READY FOR SURGERY?

You should start to talk to your preschool aged child **3-4 days before** the surgery. A few days will give him/her time to think about the information, but not enough time to become scared or worry too much.

## WHAT ARE COMMON STRESSORS MY CHILD MIGHT FEEL BEFORE SURGERY?

Some **common stressors** (things or events that cause stress) your preschooler might feel before surgery, include:

- Being left alone
- Fear of having his/her body part hurt or damaged
- Fear of needles or vaccines
- Fear of pain or the possibility of pain
- Change in routine and comfort

## HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD BEFORE SURGERY?

There are many ways you can help your child get ready for his/her surgery, including:

- **Explaining why your child needs to have surgery.** Sometimes children think they've done something wrong and that surgery is their punishment for "being bad." Tell your child the surgery isn't punishment and that surgery will help him/her get better.
- **Explaining what the hospital will be like in a simple, honest and child-friendly way.** Answer your child's questions honestly and using simple words. You could say, "The doctor is going to fix your bump" or "Your belly might hurt after surgery, but not for long."
- **Giving your child choices when you can.** This can help give your child a sense of control. Ask your child which toy he/she would like to bring to the hospital or which story he/she would like to read before the surgery.
- **Watching the "Getting Ready for Surgery" video, made by MGHfC.** This video answers many common questions about what to expect before, during and after surgery at MGHfC. You can find a link to the video on the back of this handout in the yellow "Did you know?" box.
- **Reading books about going to the hospital before the surgery.** This can help your child understand what will happen on the day of his/her surgery. Some families have found "Curious George Goes to the Hospital" and "Franklin Goes to the Hospital" to be helpful.

## HOW CAN I HELP COMFORT MY CHILD WHILE HE/SHE RECEIVES ANESTHESIA?

For most preschoolers, the **anesthesia** (medicine to help your child to sleep) is given through a mask. The mask goes over his/her nose and mouth. It does not hurt. You can help comfort your child by:

- **Bringing your child's favorite toy or blanket from home**
- **Reading him/her a book**
- **Playing a game**
- **Singing songs**
- **Counting**
- **Blowing bubbles**
- **Telling stories**
- **Watching a movie or TV**
- **Listening to music**

### ***Did you know?***

You can watch a video on the MGHfC website to help you and your child get ready for surgery.

Go to [www.massgeneralforchildren.org/getting-ready-for-surgery](http://www.massgeneralforchildren.org/getting-ready-for-surgery) to learn more.

## WHAT SHOULD I BRING FROM HOME?

Here are a few things you should bring from home:

- **Extra Pull-Ups® or clothing if your child is potty-trained or wets the bed at night.**
- **A favorite snack or sippy cup.** We have snacks in the recovery area, but you can also bring your child's favorite snacks or sippy cup for when he/she wakes up from surgery.
- **A stroller.** After surgery, some parents find it easiest for their preschooler to ride in his/her stroller.

### ***We are always here to help!***

Our Child Life Specialist can also help you get your child ready for surgery. Please call our Child Life Specialist at **617-724-1211** if you:

- Have questions about getting your child ready for surgery
- Would like ideas or language to help get your child ready for surgery
- Would like to share important information about your child with the Child Life Specialist
- Want to set up a tour of the Center for Perioperative Care before surgery

If your child is admitted to the hospital after surgery, there are also Child Life Specialists on the inpatient units.

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## **Center for Perioperative Care**

**Mass General Hospital for Children**  
55 Fruit Street, Wang building, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor  
Boston, MA 02114

[www.massgeneralforchildren.org/surgery](http://www.massgeneralforchildren.org/surgery)

For more information please call

**617-726-0270**