

Developmental Stage: School-Age (5-12 years)

Getting Your School-Aged Child Ready for Surgery

Your school-aged 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 school-aged 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 talk to your school-aged child **about 1 week before** the surgery. A few days or a week will give him/her time to think about the information and to ask questions.

WHAT ARE COMMON STRESSORS MY CHILD MIGHT FEEL BEFORE SURGERY?

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

- Loss of control
- Fear of needles or vaccines
- Fear of pain or the possibility of pain
- Fear of waking up during surgery

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD BEFORE SURGERY?

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

- **Explain 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 is not punishment and that surgery will help him/her get better.

- **Explain the good things about the surgery.** You can say something like, "After your arm heals, you can play baseball again."
- **Encourage your child to ask questions.** Answer your child's questions in an honest, simple way. You can help your child understand the surgery and clear up anything your child doesn't understand.
- **Ask your child to explain the surgery back to you.** This way you can check how well your child understands what's going to happen.
- **Give your child choices when you can.** This can help your child feel more in control. Ask which favorite things they'd like to bring from home, like an electronic, book or toy.
- **Tell your child that it's okay to cry or feel scared.** Surgery can be scary. Tell your child that being scared or crying is normal.
- **Watch 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.
- **Read 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.

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

For many school-aged children, the **anesthesia** (medicine to help your child go 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 other personal item from home**
- **Reading a book**
- **Guided imagery or thinking of a "happy place"**
- **Playing a game, like I-Spy**
- **Singing songs or listening to music**
- **Telling jokes**
- **Practicing deep breathing by saying, "Breathe in through your nose for 5 seconds, breathe out through your mouth for 5 seconds."**
- **Telling stories**
- **Watching a movie or TV**
- **Playing video games**

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 to learn more.

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, 3rd floor
Boston, MA 02114

www.massgeneralforchildren.org/surgery

For more information please call

617-726-0270