

Developmental Stage: Toddler (1-3 years)

Getting Your Toddler Ready for Surgery

Your toddler 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 toddler before his/her surgery. This handout will go over when to tell your toddler about his/her surgery and common stressors your toddler might feel. It will also give you tips on how to get your toddler ready for surgery and offers a list of things to bring from home that can help your toddler feel more relaxed and comfortable.

WHEN SHOULD I START TO GET MY TODDLER READY FOR SURGERY?

You should start to talk to your toddler **1-2 days** before the surgery. Toddlers don't yet understand the concept of time, so your toddler might start to worry if you tell him/her about the surgery too soon.

WHAT ARE COMMON STRESSORS MY TODDLER MIGHT FEEL BEFORE SURGERY?

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

- Being left alone
- Change in routine and comfort
- Stranger anxiety from being around unfamiliar people, like doctors and nurses
- Medical tools and equipment
- Restrictions in activity level or movement

HOW CAN I HELP MY TODDLER BEFORE SURGERY?

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

- **Offer your toddler choices whenever you can.** Offering choices, such as favorite toys or comfort items to bring to the hospital, can help your toddler feel more in control.
- **Explain who the medical staff are and what they are going to do.** Use simple explanations, like "This is the doctor and he is going to fix your bump." Avoid using explanations that might be scary or make your toddler worry, like "The doctor will make a cut on your leg."
- **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 toddler 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 TODDLER WHILE HE/SHE RECEIVES ANESTHESIA?

For most toddlers, the **anesthesia** (medicine to help your child to sleep) is provided 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 toddler's favorite toy or blanket from home**
- **Reading him/her a book**
- **Singing songs**
- **Counting**
- **Blowing bubbles**
- **Telling stories**
- **Watching a movie or TV**
- **Listening to music**

WHAT SHOULD I BRING FROM HOME?

Here are a few things you should bring from home:

- **Extra diapers, Pull-Ups® or clothing if your toddler is newly potty-trained or learning to potty train.**
- **A favorite snack or sippy cup for after the surgery.**
We have snacks in the recovery area, but you can also bring your toddler's favorite snacks, formula or sippy cup for when he/she wakes up from surgery.
- **A stroller.** After surgery, many parents find it easiest for their toddler to ride in his/her stroller.

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 toddler ready for surgery. Please call our Child Life Specialist at **617-724-1211** if you:

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

If your toddler 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