

Parental Tips:

Preparing for Your Preschooler's Surgery

Common worries and concerns for preschoolers

- View surgery as punishment
- Permanent damage to their bodies
- Pain (fear of needles and medical equipment)
- Imagine surgery to be worse than it will actually be
- Separation from parents or caregivers
- Unfamiliar environment and routine

Ways to support your preschooler

- **Prepare your child for surgery:** Talk with your child about surgery three to four days in advance. Concentrate on what your child will see, hear, feel, and smell. Use simple terms such as "you will get some sleepy medicine that will help you take a short nap". Explain the visit is going to help make your child feel better, and it is not due to something he or she did wrong. Give your child time to ask questions and show understanding. Keep your answers short and simple.
- **Provide reassurance:** Encourage your child to express how he/she is feeling and let your child know those feelings are normal. Let your child know it is okay to feel mad, sad, or happy and it is okay to cry. Children in this age group can be hard on themselves. They may believe they caused the need for their surgery and be embarrassed or angry at themselves. Provide reassurance that the surgery is not your child's fault or punishment for anything he/she has done wrong.
- **Bring comfort items from home:** Let your child pick out a teddy bear, blanket, or other comfort item to bring to the hospital. Allow your child to pack a small hospital bag filled with some of his/her favorite toys and activities. These comfort items can be taken with the child to the operating room.
- **Watch for pain:** While preschoolers are better able to verbalize their pain, they still rely on others to notice when they aren't feeling well. Watch for restlessness, whining, increased or decreased activity or loss of appetite. Let the nurse know if you think your child is in pain.
- **Set boundaries:** It is important that rules and boundaries that apply at home still apply at the hospital. Your child may try to test the limits, but rules give your child a sense of security. If your child is acting out, validate his/her feelings and redirect actions.
- **Play is important:** Provide opportunities for your preschooler to play with a doctor's kit or pretend medical equipment. This will give him/her the opportunity to explore items he/she may see on surgery day in a safe, comfortable environment. You can also read children's books about the hospital or having surgery.

If your child is anxious about the upcoming surgery, you can visit our website for additional support and videos to help prepare your child for surgery (www.boystownhospital.org/patientServices/Pages/Child-Life.aspx). You can contact the Child Life Department for additional support at 531-355-6040.