

Parental Tips:

Preparing for Your Toddler's Surgery

Common worries and concerns for toddlers

- Loss of independence and control
- Separation from parents/caregivers
- Toddler may view hospital visit as punishment
- Unfamiliar routine and environment
- Potential regression in skills (such as toilet training)

Ways to support your toddler

- **You are the biggest comfort:** Your voice and touch are often your toddler's biggest comfort. You know your child best, so please let staff know the best way to support you and your child during the hospital visit. Validate the way your child is feeling and offer reassurance that surgery is not a punishment. Knowing your presence can be very comforting to your toddler. Our staff will do their best to minimize the amount of time your child is away from you.
- **Simple preparation:** Toddlers are in the stage of magical thinking and often need simple explanations. An example of this is, "you are going to see the doctor to make your ears feel better". Other ways to prepare your child include reading short, simple books about going to the hospital or playing with doctor kits.
- **Timing is everything:** Toddlers don't understand the concept of time, so preparing your child too far in advance can cause stress and anxiety. Talking to your child about his/her hospital visit a day or two in advance is optimal.
- **Give control when possible:** During the toddler years, your child is learning to complete tasks on his/her own which gives a sense of control and mastery. It can be frustrating and upsetting to your child to lose that control due to being in the hospital. When possible, allow your child choices (even simple ones), such as blanket, stuffed animal, or toy he/she wants to bring to the hospital. These comfort items can be taken with the child to the operating room.
- **Remain calm:** Toddlers are in tune with their parent's emotions and will often mimic those emotions. It is normal for toddlers to be fussy before and after procedures. We have bubbles, music, and other activities available at the hospital to help soothe your child before and after surgery.
- **Regression is common:** After surgery your child may regress in skills he/she recently mastered. Examples of this may include regression in toilet training, drinking from a cup, or baby talk. If you have questions or concerns after a few weeks, contact your child's primary physician.

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.