

helping your child prepare for surgery

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You have spoken to the doctor and the plan is made: You need to set the surgery date.

While trying to control seemingly endless fears and anxious thoughts that flood your mind: Will they be in pain? Is that our only option? Will they be different? Will they have to take drugs? Are there any long-term effects? It is easy to forget one of the most difficult topics to approach: How do I tell my child? Every child has a different level of understanding related to their developmental age. However, even the young ones will have questions or fears that can be easily reduced simply by opening up conversation in a healthy and supportive way.

Step one: Process your fears alone, with family, or with a professional. If you approach your child with your own fear, your child will pick up on it and develop a more intense fear of the procedure and outcomes. Discuss concerns with the physician and ask them to discuss specifics with you privately not in front of the child.

Step two: Sit your child down with the family and tell them that their doctor is going to fix a problem. Describe it in non-threatening ways such as, you will go the hospital and take a little nap and when you wake up, we will be right there with you.

Step three: Answer all questions. Information is the key to reducing anxiety and fear. You do not need to go into every realistic detail; however you can provide reassurance such as: "Will it hurt?"

You might feel some pain but the doctors are really good at giving you liquids (medications) that will help the pain go away. "Are they going to use a needle" Yes, they have to have a way to help you stay safe during surgery but the pinch only lasts a second, after that you won't even feel it.

Children, no matter what the age, do not appreciate being told lies. Have an open discussion and encourage them to ask the doctors any questions they want. Do not minimize their feelings or fears. Discuss how the surgery will help them feel better and the benefits a few months down the road. Focus your energy on the good parts. Ask for a tour of the hospital so your child will be able to see where they will be and that it is not scary. This will provide a sense of relief to both you and your child and allow for an open discussion about surgery in a non-threatening manner.

Step Four: Be prepared: No one likes having surgery or experiencing pain. Download relaxing music that your child likes. Download or print relaxation scripts to help distract them when they are uncomfortable. Bring games, coloring books, toys and blankets that help them feel secure and in control. And finally, we all like to feel special. Wrap some special gifts and surprises that you know your child will love and surprise them each day with a reward for being so brave. Surgery is never easy; however the more prepared you and your child feel, the better the outcome.

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