



## Preparing your Child for Surgery: A Parent's Guide

### Importance of Preparation

Being honest with your child is the most effective tool of preparation. Children are curious and they need to know and understand why they are having surgery. The unknown is always more frightening than reality in the mind of a child. Children will trust their parent/caregiver on the day of surgery if they are treated with openness and honesty. This leads to increased trust of the hospital staff and a more positive hospital and surgical experience.

### Developmental Concerns

Infants are developing a sense of trust and may display anxiety when separated from their caregiver. Toddlers may have trouble related to separation even though they are striving for independence. Preschoolers have vivid imaginations that can lead to fantasies related to surgical experience. School-aged children are developing a need for independence and can be confused about surgical procedures. Adolescents have a need for privacy, respect and independence. They are also concerned with their body image.

### Points to Discuss

- The name of the surgery and the location on the child's body
- Why the surgery is necessary
- Hospital attire - pajamas and identification band
- Separation from you for a period of time
- Comfort object to bring (such as a stuffed animal or blanket) on the day of surgery
- Eating and drinking. Typically, the child will not be able to have anything to eat or drink before surgery
- How the child will feel after the surgery
- Many new people in the hospital to help
- Lab tests or x-rays before or after surgery

### On the Day of Surgery

Nursing and anesthesia staff members will take care of your child's medical needs and help answer your questions. A Child Life Specialist may be available to see your child on the day of surgery. She will focus on what will happen, when things will happen, practice separation with your child and allow your child to become familiar with anesthesia and other medical equipment. Your child may see a thermometer, EKG leads, pulse oximeter, anesthesia mask (and the scents we use to flavor the mask), blood pressure cuff, stethoscope and I.V. tubing, bag and pole.

### Common Behavioral Changes Following a Hospital Experience

Your child's behavior may change before or after surgery. Children less than 7 years of age are often the most affected, but children of all ages can have behavioral issues related to surgery. Children under 5 years of age may go back to an earlier stage of development such as bed-wetting or thumb sucking. Clinging is also common with toddlers and preschoolers. School-aged children may have questions and concerns following a surgical or hospital experience and may have an increase in dependency for a period of time. Their questions may be about their future well-being. Adolescents are more concerned with their bodies and may have an increased sensitivity about their appearance. For further information, please see Changes in Behavior brochure available at the hospital.

### Ask Questions

You are a vital part of your child's health care team and we encourage you to ask questions. If you have any questions before the day of surgery, contact your pediatrician or the surgical unit where your child is scheduled and ask to speak with a Child Life Specialist.