

How to Prepare Your School-age Child for Their Surgery or Procedure

Having surgery or a procedure can be scary for children of any age. This handout will tell you more about how to prepare your school-age child for their surgery or procedure.

What your child may be worried about at this age

School-age children, or those between the ages of **5 to 12**, are learning to have control of their surroundings, their bodies, and how to work together with other people. They don't have control anymore when they go to the hospital, which may be hard for them.

Some common things school-age children are worried about before a surgery or procedure include:

- Fear of harm to their body or looking different after surgery.
- Fear of pain or not waking up from surgery.
- Not being able to make their own choices.

When you should prepare your child

You can prepare your child **1 to 2 weeks before** the surgery or procedure.

How to prepare your child

- **Reading books:** See **Additional Resources** below for age-appropriate materials that help prepare your child for their surgery or procedure.
- **Have honest and continuing conversations with your child:** Ask what they already know or understand and ask if they have questions.
- **Help them to be involved in their own care.**

Talking with your child about their surgery or procedure

Some children like to learn more about what to expect, and others may not want to know too much. Every person is different, and you know your child best. When talking with your child about what to expect:

- Find a time when you and your child can talk without being interrupted.
- Speak honestly, positively, and in a way that your child can understand.
- Listen to your child's feelings and concerns.

Some things that your child may want to talk about include:

- The hospital.
- The surgery or procedure.

- The care they will be receiving.

It's OK if you don't know the answers to your child's questions. Your child's care team will be able to answer any questions that your child might have. It can be helpful to write down your family's questions and bring them along on the day of the surgery or procedure.

Additional resources

See the table below for age-appropriate materials that help prepare your child for their surgery or procedure.

Resource name	Information
Saul Has Surgery	In this online story, a young child named Saul tells about what happened when they had surgery. They discover that everything turns out OK.
Get Ready for Your Child's Surgery	This online article for parents shares things you can do to help you and your child prepare for surgery.
Franklin Goes to the Hospital by Paulette Bourgeois	This book is about Franklin, a young turtle who goes to the hospital for surgery. He learns that even though he's feeling scared, he can still be brave.
Surgery on Sunday by Kat Harrison	This book is about Sunday, a young child who is worried about their ear surgery. They soon learn that surgery isn't so scary after all.
A Sleepy Tale: My First Surgery by Jennifer Maziad, MD	This book is a fun story that will help children prepare for the process of having surgery and getting anesthesia.
S is for Surgery: A Kid's Surgery Book from A-Z by Dyan Fox	This activity book tells children about what might happen while at the hospital.

If you would like to discuss these or other ideas for preparing your child for their surgery or procedure, you can call the **Child Life office** at **(650) 497-8336**. Our Child Life Specialists can visit your child in the hospital and help them understand and deal with their surgery or procedure. They also help children feel more comfortable about their medical condition and why they are in the hospital.

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