

How to Prepare Your Toddler 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 toddler for their surgery or procedure.

What your child may be worried about at this age

Toddlers, or children between the ages of **1 and 3 years**, are usually more comfortable with people, places, and things they are used to. Going to the hospital changes their daily routine, which may be hard for them. Some common things toddlers are worried about before a surgery or procedure include:

- Being away from parents.
- Loss of control.
- New places and people they don't know.
- Unfamiliar medical equipment.

When you should prepare your child

You can prepare **the day before or the day of** your child's surgery or procedure.

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** department 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.