



## Preparing for Surgery

Having surgery can be a stressful experience for both parents and children. The following information will help prepare your child and your family for an upcoming surgical visit.

### How can a child life specialist help?

A child life specialist (CLS) can help prepare your child for surgery through medical play, a pre-operation tour and/or preparation on surgery day. Medical play is an opportunity for your child to safely engage and feel comfortable with medical equipment prior to surgery. Children of all ages are encouraged to ask questions, which will be answered by a CLS using developmentally appropriate language. Child life specialists are available on both Dallas and Frisco campuses. You may ask clinic staff or reach out directly to a CLS for more information on how your child can be prepared for surgery.

### Infant/Toddler Developmental Stage

This group often mirrors emotions expressed by their parents and may not understand the reason for surgery. They may show stress by crying or get upset when entering the building or seeing a staff member wearing scrubs. Your child may recognize they are in a different environment with unfamiliar people. Offering comfort and reassurance through physical contact and encouraging words can provide support to your child. Remember, it is your right as a parent to ask questions.

You can help your child cope using the following tips:

- Keep lights dim or play soft music, avoid over stimulating your child
- Provide tactile stimulation, such as swaddling or a pacifier
- Bring comfort items from home - toys, blanket, stuffed animal
- Build a routine during their stay

### Preschool Developmental Stage

Children who are in this stage may not understand why they are having surgery. When your child feels out of control of their situation, they may show regressive behaviors such as throwing tantrums, acting clingy, wetting the bed, thumb sucking, baby talk, etc. This response is appropriate for this developmental stage. One way to help is to provide comfort and support to your child.

You can help your child cope using the following tips:

- Encourage expressive play
- Give your child choices when appropriate
- Explain the reason for surgical visit
- Bring comfort items from home – toys, blanket, stuffed animal



## School Age Developmental Stage

Your child may have overheard conversations you have had with their doctor and/or nurses. From those conversations, they may understand needing surgery, but not be able to fully grasp what to expect before and after their procedure. You can help by talking with your child and answering questions using clear, honest communication.

You can help your child cope using the following tips:

- Bring comfort items from home – stuffed animal, blanket, electronics, book or game
- Offer appropriate choices
- Suggest that your child write down questions for medical staff
- Encourage your child to ask questions and participate in their own care

## Adolescent/Teenager Developmental Stage

Your teen may be emotional or feel that surgery is unnecessary. They worry that surgery could interfere with sports, school and friends which is appropriate. Adolescents may understand the reason for surgery, but not fully grasp all the details and long-term outcomes. When they're ready, encourage your teen to talk through their thoughts about their upcoming surgery. This will help you know what your teen is thinking and gives you the opportunity to validate their feelings.

You can help your teen cope using the following tips:

- Bring comfort items from home – blanket, electronics, books or game
- Allow time for your teen to process feelings about surgery
- Give your teen control and independence, when possible
- Encourage your teen to ask questions and participate in their own care

## Child Life contact information

Frisco Child Life Team:  
(469) 515-7187  
childlife.frisco@tsrh.org

Dallas Child Life Team:  
(214) 559-7795  
child.life@tsrh.org