



# A B O U T F A C E

## Preparing Your Child For Surgery

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Parents often wonder how they can prepare their child for surgery. Helpful approaches depend on the child's age and stage development. Infants cannot easily be made aware of plans for surgery but having parents available to provide comfort and security after the baby wakes up from surgery is essential to the small child or infant.

- Young children pick up on parent's anxiety quickly so anything you can do to prepare and take care of yourself when your child undergoes surgery will go a long way in supporting them.
- Bring familiar objects such as favourite toys, blankets, books or music with you to the hospital.
- Preschool and school aged children may benefit from learning about hospitals. Reading books together about children having surgery will familiarize your child with objects and people s/he will meet in the hospital. Playing with toy medical kits and making up pretend games about hospital experiences will also be helpful.
- Older children may enjoy coloring/activity books or talking with other children who have had surgery. Role playing is a useful way to help your child become familiar with the routines of the hospital. You may want to practice how to answer questions that the nurse, doctor or other hospital staff might ask. You may want to practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or bubble blowing.
- Older school age children and teens do well when they are involved in information sharing and decision making sessions with the surgeon and other hospital staff. Encourage teens to speak for themselves. Also respect the privacy and dignity of all children but especially teenagers as this is important to them.
- The social worker or nurse on the craniofacial team will be able to give you suggestions specifically for your child. Being honest with your child is very important. Open and Honest discussions a week or two before the day of surgery will be helpful. Share information in a confident manner and let your child know you will be with them whenever possible.
- Some children's hospitals have special preparation classes for children who are having surgery. These programs provide an opportunity for children to ask questions, see, touch, and smell some of the objects they will see when they go to the hospital. Ask your craniofacial team if such a program exists in your hospital.
- There are multiple great ways to prepare your child. Take cues from your child. If they do not have a lot of questions then there is no need to push them. If they do have questions, answer them directly. Share your feelings about the surgery and talk about it as a family. Siblings who remain at home often have just as many questions. Some families like to take pictures or write a journal in order to share the experiences of surgery with friends and family members who stay at home.

AboutFace is a national charitable organization dedicated to helping individuals with facial differences and their families. We support individuals whose differences are present at birth or acquired as a result of disease or trauma. If you or someone you know has a facial difference and would like more information, contact AboutFace at 1-800- 665-FACE or [www.aboutface.ca](http://www.aboutface.ca).

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