

# Preparing Your Child for Surgery: Preschoolers (3-5 Years)

Coming to the hospital can be a difficult experience for children of any age as there are many new sights, sounds and unfamiliar faces. Preparing your child ahead of their hospital visit can help decrease his/her anxiety and fear and increase his/her ability to cope with what is happening. It can be difficult to find the right words to say to your child so we have created this information sheet to help you prepare your child for surgery in a way that provides simple, honest and accurate information.

## Your child's development at this age:

- Have an active imagination
- Use play to learn about experiences and express emotions
- Like demonstrating independence
- May believe that they are at the hospital for bad behavior
- Can feel uncomfortable by new people, spaces and hospital equipment
- May be afraid of injections



## How you can help your child:

- Prepare your child approximately 3-5 days before the surgery by:
  - Use soft words to explain why your child needs surgery and what body part will be affected. For example: Teddy's leg is hurt and the doctor's want to help Teddy feel better. The doctor will give Teddy some sleep medicine so they can help Teddy's leg get better. After Teddy wakes up, he will sleep at the hospital for one night.
  - Remind your child that he/she will have some "sleepy medicine" so they don't feel, see or hear anything during surgery
  - Use a play doctor's kit and doll or stuffed animal to practice going to the hospital. Pay attention to any fears or misunderstandings your child is showing through play.
  - Discuss what may be different when they wake up (such as a cast or bandage)
  - Share information around what your child will hear, see and feel at the hospital
- Encourage your child to ask questions
- Discuss ways that may help your child relax if they are feeling scared (hugs from parent, watching a movie, blowing bubbles, etc.)
- Remain calm as your child can sense your emotions
- Encourage your child to help pack a bag for the hospital (favourite toys, blanket, teddy bear, etc.)

[More information on the back](#)  
Development Date. September 2020

**Remember:**

You know your child best. Please share any information about your child with the nurse or doctor so they can best support your family during your stay at Sidra.

Child Life Specialists are experts in child development and can help your child to feel more comfortable about surgery. This can be done through education and preparation, teaching and practicing coping strategies or by providing play opportunities to help normalize their environment.

If you think your child would benefit from additional support at the time of their surgery, please ask your nurse or doctor to call your team's Child Life Specialist.

Sidra Medicine cares about your health. For reliable health information, visit our Patient Resource Center or find us online at [www.sidra.org](http://www.sidra.org). The information in this leaflet should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and the advice of your doctor. Ask your healthcare provider about this information if you have questions.

Development Date. September 2020