

How to prepare your child for surgery

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To relieve anxiety, be honest, use simple language to explain what's going to happen, experts advise.

(HealthDay)—Parents can do a number of things to prepare their children for surgery, experts say.

Children, especially younger ones, may experience [separation anxiety](#) and fear. They're also likely to pick up on their [parents'](#) feelings, according to Dr. Dorothy Rocourt, a [pediatric surgeon](#) at Penn State Hershey Children's Hospital.

"If the parents are super nervous, the [children](#) are just as nervous. When they are comfortable with what's going on and with the provider, they send off those vibes or cues to their child," Rocourt said in a hospital news release.

One way to relieve anxiety is to keep the child well-informed about the [surgery](#). This can include specialists explaining the procedure in a way youngsters can understand, such as through playful interaction.

"Parents can use simple words to help their child understand why they are going to the hospital or why they need surgery," Ashley Kane, manager of the hospital's Child Life Program, said in the news release.

Parents should be honest about going to the hospital and having surgery, and the situation should never be associated with doing something bad or punishment, she added.

"We want to make sure they understand that the doctors, nurses and staff are there to help them get better and not make it sound like the people a child meets in the hospital are mean or bad," Kane said.

While in the [hospital](#), items such as a child's favorite stuffed toy, blanket, or sippy cup can be especially comforting, she suggested.

"It's really important to have those familiar things along with them when they're in a different environment and out of their norm," Kane said.

Additional measures are needed when children with special needs are having surgery.

"When we're assessing them in the office, we take cues from the family on how to approach the subject with such kids," Rocourt said.

At the Penn State Hershey Children's Hospital, additional reading materials are provided for parents and families with older children who have autism, and multi-sensory distraction machines provide soft music, water sounds, colorful lighting or images projected on the ceiling when youngsters awaken from anesthesia, according to the news release.

"It really helps with the children with autism because it sort of puts them on a different plain, in a different world; it puts them in that comfort zone," Rocourt said.

More information: The American College of Surgeons offers a guide for [parents of children having surgery](#).

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