My Texas Children’s Journey
What to Expect at Your Surgery Visit at Texas Children’s

A Social Story to Prepare Patients and Families for Visits
Before the Visit

• Discuss what will happen during the visit by using words and pictures your child can understand. For example:
  
  • When discussing surgery, you might state: “Surgery is a way that doctors help people’s bodies.”
  
  • When discussing anesthesia, you might state: “Before the surgery starts, a person is given ‘sleepy medicine.’ The anesthesiologist (or ‘sleepy medicine doctor’) gives people the sleepy medicine. The job of sleepy medicine is to make people sleep and not feel anything during surgery, so nothing during surgery will hurt. Sleepy medicine also ensures that people don’t see or hear anything during surgery. There are different ways to get sleepy medicine, but most children breathe the sleepy medicine through mask. When the surgery is done, the sleepy medicine doctor stops giving the person sleepy medicine, and they wake-up in the wake-up room with their family.”

• Avoid focusing on the unpleasant parts of the visit as this may cause everyone to feel more anxious.

• Create a Surgery Plan. This involves considering what you will bring to the visit to help your child communicate and feel comfortable. This might include a stuffed animal, pillow, blanket, tablet, or noise-cancelling headphones. It might be helpful to bring some rewards for your child for being brave and following instructions during their visit. It might also involve thinking about what to share with the medical staff for the visit to go as smoothly as possible.
Before the Visit

• **Follow eating and drinking instructions before surgery.** It is really important for your child to have an empty stomach when arriving for surgery. Stop food 8 hours before arrival, stop milk/formula 6 hours before arrival, stop breast milk 4 hours prior to arrival, and stop clear liquids 1 hour prior to arrival. Ensure your child does not sneak any drink or food, as the surgery may have to be cancelled for safety reasons. Follow any other specific instructions from your child’s doctor.

• **Follow bathing instructions before surgery.** It is important for your child to be bathed prior to surgery to help stop the spread of germs. Wash your child’s body using soap and water. Pat dry with a freshly washed towel. Put on clean clothes. Do **not** apply lotion, deodorant, cream, or powder and do **not** shave near the spot of the surgery. If bathing the night before surgery, sleep on clean sheets. Follow any other specific instructions from your child’s doctor.

• **Bring and use visual supports.** Your child may benefit from reading a Social Story or seeing a list of all the steps involved in their Surgery visit.

• **Request Child Life.** Child life specialists are available to help prepare children, teenagers, and young adults for medical treatments and procedures. To request a child life specialist, please make your request when checking-in for surgery or at least 48 business hours in advance via phone or email: 832-826-1650 or childlife@texaschildrens.org.
During the Visit

• **Share your suggestions** with medical staff if there are parts that might be difficult for your child.

• **Remain calm and reassuring.** Controlling your expressions and emotions will help your child do the same.

• Allow your child to have a **stuffed animal, pillow, blanket, tablet, or noise-cancelling headphones** to help relax, but eating or drinking is **not** allowed.

• **Use simple, direct language** to explain what is happening. For example, you could say, "The doctor is going to help (name of body part)."

• Ask open-ended questions about feelings (e.g., “tell me your feelings about today) and **acknowledge feelings**, but avoid long conversations.

• Help your child see medical **staff as helpers**.

• **Praise your child’s** brave behavior and ability to complete the visit.

• **For caregivers:** You will be able to wait in the waiting room or visit the hospital cafeteria for food during your child’s procedure. You can bring something to work on to pass the time. It is important to let staff know if you step away.
A note for parents/caregivers:

Some children and teenagers benefit from having a written or picture-based guide for situations that are new or not part of their regular routine. A Social Story can be a helpful tool to provide a reasonable overview about an upcoming situation or event so that children and teenagers know what to expect. Some families may find it helpful to read the story with their child a few days prior to the visit. Others may find it more helpful to read it the morning of the visit or on the way to the visit.

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Today I am going to Texas Children’s Hospital to have surgery. Surgery is a way that doctors help people’s bodies.
I might get dropped off, someone might help my family park our car or we may drive under the building to park our car ourselves.

We drive to the hospital!
Inside the hospital, I go to the welcome desk to make sure we know where to go.
I will ride the elevator to get to the 7th Floor.
I visit the **front desk** to check-in for my appointment.
While I wait, I visit the admissions desk. I may also wait in a large room with other people. Waiting can be really hard. That’s why I brought some of my favorite things!
They called my name! I now walk into the pre-operation ("Pre-Op") area with a staff member.

The staff member is trained to help make sure I’m ready for my surgery. They are super nice and good at their job!
The staff member shows me my Pre-Op room.

The Pre-Op room is a large room with chairs, a TV, and a computer. I can sit on a chair and watch the TV, or play with my toys from home.
Now it’s time to change into my hospital pajamas.

These may feel a little different from my pajamas at home.
They might ask my family about the last time I ate or drank, my allergies, the type of surgery I am having, and my body. They will ask my family’s permission for surgery. They may ask questions a few times to make sure they have all my information correct!

Many people will enter the Pre-Op room to visit me and to ask questions. I might meet my nurses, doctors, and other members of my team.
They may ask to take my blood pressure and wrap a piece of material around my arm.  
I will feel a tight squeeze!

They may ask me to hold my finger still and wrap a piece of tape around my finger.  
This may feel sticky!

The nurses and doctors might ask me to do things too!  
They may ask me to do these things in my room or in the hallway.
They may ask me to stand on a scale or next to a wall to get my **weight** and **height**. This will not hurt!

They may ask to take my **temperature** by putting a thermometer close to my forehead. This will not hurt either!
After this, someone may hold up a stethoscope to check my heart and an otoscope to check my ears. I will feel a gentle press against my chest and my ears.
Then the doctor or nurse may **draw** with a **marker** on the part of my body they are going to help.

This may tickle but will not hurt!

This is also a great time to let anyone know if I need to **use the bathroom** one last time!
I may be given some medicine while I’m still in my room.

It’s important to drink the medicine quickly so it can help me relax.
After I take my medicine, the nurse may bring me a bed or ask me to sit in a wagon. But they also might let me keep sitting or standing with my family.
A nurse or doctor will come back into my Pre-Op room for a final safety check. They will look at my hospital bracelet to read my name, birthday, and hospital number and talk about the part of my body that will be helped by surgery.

This is a great time for my family to share anything I might need to help me separate from them or to help me wear a mask! (See coping plan on page 44)
I will say ‘see you later!’ to my family when I reach the double doors. My family is so proud of how brave I am going to be!
As I go down the hallway, it may be **loud** or **busy**. I may see other doctors, nurses, and kids. I may see different pieces of equipment and I may hear announcements.

I can wear **noise-canceling headphones** if the sound bothers me!
I will enter the operating room. It is a large room with a big bed, computers, lights in the shape of circles, and many people.

Everyone is here to help me!
I will be asked to **sit** or **lay** on the bed. The staff will help me do that.
The doctor may put 3 stickers on my chest to help listen to my heart and lungs. This may feel sticky like a piece of tape.

The doctor may also wrap a piece of material around my arm. I might feel a tight squeeze.
The doctor will put a sleepy medicine mask on my nose and mouth. I will feel wind blowing on my face. First I might notice a smell depending on what smell I picked. Then I might notice a strange smell, like nail polish.
Now it’s time to **fall asleep**.
I can use **coping skills** to help me fall asleep!

I can sing my ABC’s. I can count. I can play with a fidget toy. I can take deep breaths. I can hug my stuffed animal.
I may start to feel like the room is **spinning**. I can hear what people are saying but am having a hard time seeing them.

This is **normal** and **I am safe**! It is time to fall asleep with my sleepy medicine!
Now it’s time to **wake up**! The doctors worked hard to help my body while I was asleep!

When I wake up, I am in the **wake-up room** (the Post Anesthesia Care Unit or “**PACU**”). I see my family when I wake up!
Once I am in the PACU, I will see my family and nurse.

The stickers on my finger and chest and the medicine straw (or IV) will stay connected to me. I may hear beeping sounds from machines and voices of other people.
I can now **drink liquids** again!

I can have a drink from home or I can ask my nurse for a drink, slushy, or popsicle!
I will \textit{stay} in the PACU until I am breathing and drinking okay.

When I am breathing and drinking okay, the nurses will \textit{remove} the \textit{stickers} and \textit{IV} from my body. This will feel sticky like a piece of tape being taken off of me! They will also put a \textit{bandaid} and \textit{soft piece of cloth} on my arm.
The nurses and doctors will talk to my family to give them instructions for taking care of me at home.

It’s time to go home!
I will be rolled out in a **wheelchair** by a staff member. I say **good-bye** to everyone!

My family may stop at the front desk to call for our car, or I might get right into the elevator to get our car.
I did it!

I stayed in the room!
I sang or counted in my mask!
I drank liquids in the wake up room!
Everyone is so proud of me!
Please complete a brief survey to let us know about your experience using this social story!

Or visit https://redcap.link/TCHsocialstory

Once you finish the survey, please continue clicking for additional resources
Tools to Help Your Child Prepare for Surgery
Your child may already be familiar with using a visual schedule at school or even at home. A visual schedule can help prepare children for new or unfamiliar situations, such as surgery. Visual schedules can be a checklist going down a page or even a sequence of pictures, like the one below.
A First-Then board provides a visual for the child that once they participate in a non-preferred task, such as surgery, they will be able to engage in a more preferred task afterwards, such as watching a favorite TV show. During surgery, a First-Then board can help motivate your child to take part in an activity that is not enjoyable by clarifying that a preferred activity will occur after it is over.
Distraction/Relaxation Techniques:

• When children think about going to the doctor, they may become worried about the visit. You can help by teaching your child simple relaxation techniques. Distraction may help by taking your child’s mind off stressful events, thoughts, or emotions and putting attention on positive thoughts or activities.

• Techniques include:

  • **Deep breathing**: Teach your child to take deep breaths by slowly breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth. For young children, using a pinwheel or bubbles to practice can help them focus on their breathing and distract from their stress.

  • **Muscle tensing/relaxing**: Have your child relax by focusing on different muscles of the body and tensing and relaxing them one at a time.

  • **Visualization**: Encourage your child to imagine something pleasant and to visualize that scene with eyes closed. Suggest thinking about smells, sounds, and touch of what is imagined. Using pictures or objects to remind your child of favorite places or activities can help this strategy be more successful.

  • **Favorite toys/activities/books**: Involve your child in distracting activities before the procedure begins and, if possible, before your child begins to become upset. Use a favorite toy, a particularly engaging topic of conversation, or a game that does not require movement.
Practice to Help Prepare for Visit

• Practicing medical procedures in familiar places, such as home or school, help children understand what to expect and help promote cooperation.

• Families are encouraged to pretend to complete a surgery visit with a stuffed animal or doll. Families should have their child pick a comfort item, distraction technique, or play item to practice with the doll or animal. They might also use toy medical equipment to act out the procedure.

• Once the family is done pretending to complete a surgery visit, the child should choose a reward such as a sticker or special activity to complete after surgery is over.
## My Surgery Plan

Think about everything you need to help you have a successful surgery visit. Make a plan ahead of time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To help prepare me for the visit, I will:</th>
<th>To help me communicate during the visit, I will:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>To help me feel comfortable during the visit, I will bring my:</td>
<td>Tips I will share for helping me separate from my family:</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Information I will share about how I tolerate a mask:</td>
<td>Things I will bring for when surgery is over:</td>
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