

Preparing your child for a large craniofacial surgery

This checklist, designed by Shannon Clark (PhD Pediatric Psychologist at Texas Children's Hospital in Austin) was created to help kids and their families prepare emotionally, mentally, and physically for Halo surgery, and to make recovery smoother. Many of these strategies can be started days to weeks before surgery.



Learn and Practice Coping Skills

- ☐ **Relaxation Exercises:** Practice belly breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or guided imagery daily.
- ☐ **Distraction Skills:** Identify favorite music, games, puzzles, shows, or books to use before and after surgery.
- ☐ **Imagery:** Create a favorite place in your mind (beach, mountain, favorite park) to “visit” during stressful moments.

Prepare for the Hospital Environment

- ☐ **Bring Comfort Items:** Favorite blanket, stuffed animal, pillowcase, or photos from home.
- ☐ **Entertainment:** Books, coloring supplies, tablet with downloaded shows/games, or craft kits.
- ☐ **Noise Management:** Headphones or earplugs to reduce hospital noise at night.

Build Understanding and Reduce Unknowns

- ☐ **Learn About the Surgery:** Read age-appropriate materials or watch child-friendly hospital videos about Halo placement and care.
- ☐ **Practice Questions:** Write down any questions about the surgery, hospital stay, or recovery to ask the medical team.
- ☐ **Role-Play Medical Routines:** Use dolls or toys to practice what might happen (checking blood pressure, listening to the heart).

Regulate Body and Mind Before and After Surgery

- ☐ **Pre-Surgery Routine:** Practice calming activities in the days leading up to surgery, especially before bedtime.
- ☐ **Post-Surgery Routine:** Use relaxation or distraction before medical care tasks (e.g., cleaning pin sites, physical therapy).
- ☐ **Movement and Positioning:** Learn safe ways to move with the Halo in place, as advised by your care team.

Emotional Support and Safe Space for Processing

- ☐ **Talk Openly:** Encourage your child to share fears, worries, or frustrations without judgment.
- ☐ **Normalize Emotions:** Let them know it's okay to feel nervous, sad, or frustrated.
- ☐ **Pediatric Psychologist Support:**
 - o If possible, connect with a pediatric psychologist before surgery. If family lives in Texas, Dr. Shannon Clark can be a helpful support and the medical team can help with scheduling, if interested.
 - o These providers are often found within children's hospital systems and can:
 - Teach coping skills for pain, anxiety, and stress.
 - Provide a safe space to process feelings about surgery.
 - Help kids prepare questions for their care team.

Family Preparation

- ☐ **Coordinate Support:** Arrange for help at home during recovery.
- ☐ **Prepare the Home:** Make sleeping/resting areas comfortable and accessible.
- ☐ **Know the Plan:** Understand follow-up appointments, therapy schedules, and restrictions.

Quick Coping Reminders (Print and Keep Handy)

- ☐ **Breathe slow and deep** -breathe in for 4, out for 6
- ☐ **Find something to notice** - colors, textures, smells, or sounds around you
- ☐ **Choose a distraction** - music, story, game, or memory
- ☐ **Use your "calm place" imagery** - picture it in detail