

How to Care for Infants and Toddlers Having Surgery

What might cause my child to be worried or scared?

Surgery is a stressful experience for children. Infants and toddlers are no exception. For children of this age, the largest sources of stress are:

- Separation from caregivers and strangers,
- A change in routine,
- The new environment (including lights, sounds, people, smells).

Young children often have common fears about surgery. They may include:

- Not understanding what is happening,
- Assuming the hospital is punishment, or that they did something wrong,
- Feeling a lack of control.

How will I know if my child is worried or scared?

Children of this age typically tell the adults around them that they are scared or worried by:

- Behaving in ways they might not typically (testing limits or boundaries),
- Crying, even about things that seem simple,
- Seeking physical closeness to you.

How Can I Support my Child?

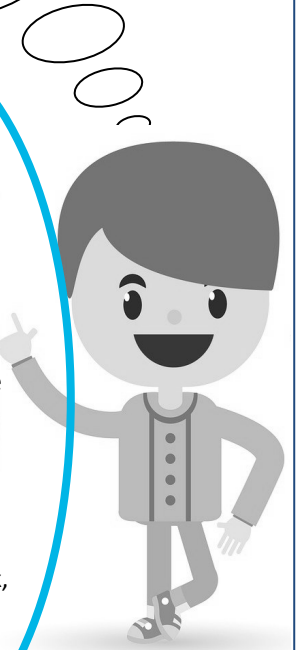
Children of this age co-regulate. This means that for them to manage their emotions, they need their caregivers to model this. You can help by:

- Use simple language to tell your child (1-3 years) what they will experience next, one step at a time.
- Play! Use toys, books, stories and bubbles to help your child feel more comfortable in the new environment.
- For infants, hold and rock them. You can stroke their hair or sing to them.
- Remember that your child may cling to you or cry. Be patient, and use a calming voice. Utilize typical boundaries however avoid punishing behaviours that result from fear.
- Give your child appropriate choices.

Taking care of yourself is important! Eat breakfast, drink some water, and ask questions. If you are calm, your child will feel more supported.

Familiar items can make your child bridge home and hospital. The following are helpful:

- familiar cup or bottle (if bottle fed)
- Stuffy or blanket
- Pacifier
- Favourite book, toy or game



What are ways to support your child at home?

- Before surgery, you can read books about the hospital or the body like 'Curious George Goes to the Hospital'
- Some children require longer transition times, its best to make more time for bed time routines.
- Be sure to have the things you will need at home to support your child. For example, if they will only be able to have liquids after ensure you have juice or popsicles at home.