

# Supporting Young Children For Surgery

## **What might cause my child to be worried or scared?**

Surgery is a stressful experience for children. For children ages 3 to 5 years old, there are many sources of fear:

- **A lack of control.** Children are more cooperative when they have choice and feel heard.
- **Separation from caregivers.** Children at this age still rely on their caregivers to help them manage their feelings. When they separate, this can cause fear.
- **A change in routine.** Being able to predict what comes next makes children feel safe. When things happen they were not expecting, children have a hard time coping.
- **The new environment** including lights, sounds, people, smells) Familiar spaces and faces make children feel secure. When they are in a new place, being apprehensive is normal.

## **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
- Refusing to complete tasks like changing clothes, or drinking.

**Reach out to Child Life if you are unsure of what to tell your child. They can help you with words to use, and ways to get ready for coming to the hospital.**

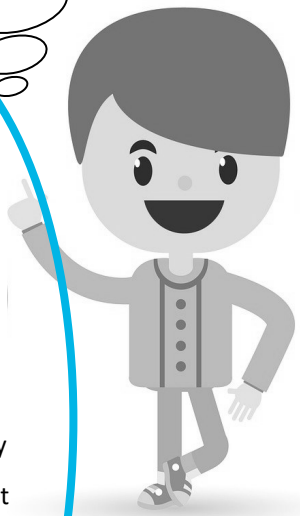
## **How Can I Support my Child?**

Children of this age group benefit greatly with the following support from caregivers:

- Using simple and safe words to explain surgery, like “the doctor is going to fix ...”, or “you will go to sleep with the doctors help.” You can use play to help your children learn
- Use “first this, then that” statements to help your child get ready for the next step,
- Play! Use toys, books, stories and bubbles to help your child feel more comfortable in the new environment.
- 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. Avoid “do you to \_\_\_ now?” or “can you \_\_\_?” These phrases allow your child the option of saying no, when its not really a choice. A more helpful phrase is “do you want sit with me, or by yourself?”

**Familiar items** can make your child bridge home and hospital. Having your child help pack The following can provide them feels of control and safety

- Stuffy or blanket
- Favourite book, toy or game
- Familiar cup or bottle



## **What are ways to support your child at home?**

- Some children will need extra time for things like daycare or school drop off or even bedtime 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. Have books, movies, or quiet activities available, too!