

Parental Consideration: When talking to kids about surgery, you don't need to focus on the actual/literal "hows" of what happens when they are asleep, but help them understand the "why" and what they will actually experience (the before surgery and the after surgery)

Let them know they will be getting surgery 2-3 days prior, and remind them the morning of the appointment. Talk about the concrete steps for the day and what they will experience:

- where you are going, how you are getting there
- what they can play in the waiting room, what a coping plan is
- very simply what will happen (see the doctor, get sleep medicine, wake up with bandaid)
- what will happen following the event (go home to rest, go pick up sibling from school, watch movie?)

Using play or a book to initiate preparation for surgery allows for repetition of the information, and helps them to understand the routine of the beginning, middle and end for experience. You can also make a visual story board showing the steps of the day to have hanging in your home to give reminders of what to expect.

When kids ask...

What is surgery?

"Doctors helping your body"

"You will not be awake while the doctors are helping/fixing your body, you will get medicine that will make your whole body sleep (**see anaesthesia script).

Why do I have to have surgery?

Make a concrete connection by pointing out something they have been experiencing -

- What symptoms are they feeling? What are doctors checking? What is feeling different about their body?

Help them understand the part of their body that needs help and relate back to positive experiences post surgery

- "After the doctors help your heart heal and feel better, you will be able to run fast without feeling tired."

What happens before surgery?

"That morning you won't be able to eat. The sleep medicine helps your whole body go to sleep, so your stomach goes to sleep too and won't be able to do its job of digesting food."

- Plan for what to do before surgery or while going to surgery (favorite story/movie, favorite vacation/place, sing favorite song)
- What do you want to bring with you? (favorite stuffed animal/blanket)

What happens after Surgery?

"You might feel groggy or super sleepy for a while, kind of how it feels when you wake up super super early in the morning."

Remind them... "mom/dad/caregiver will be right there with you, and a nurse will be there taking care of you."

"When you wake up let anyone know if you are uncomfortable anywhere in your body."

Support them in understanding what will be different:

- Will there be a bandage?
- Will their way of everyday life change after? (medicine, a tube)

Check with your medical team, but sometimes it can be helpful to share a positive experience to look forward to:

- Eat a popsicle when they wake up
- Go home after surgery