



SPECIAL CARE

An Oral Health Professional's Guide to Serving Children with Special Health Care Needs

Preparing Children and Their Families for the Hospital Dental Experience

Being hospitalized can scare children. These are some of the things that may scare them:

- Separation from family and home
- Oral health procedures/surgery
- Masked and gowned strangers
- Needles and medicine
- New sights, sounds, and smells

It is important that children know what to expect while in the hospital. They also need support before they go to the hospital, while they are there, and after they come home. It may help to give parents and children the following information.

Before the Procedure:

- What medications the child will take before the procedure (also, review the medications the child is already taking to decide whether changes may be needed)
- What the child will be able to eat
- Where the procedure will take place
- How the child will be transported

During the Procedure:

- Who will perform the procedure
- Whether the child will be awake, sedated, or anesthetized
- How the child will be positioned (whether the child will be secured or required to remain still)
- How the child will be clothed
- Whether the child will be hooked up to any equipment
- What medications the child will receive, and how
- The length of the procedure
- How much discomfort to expect
- What the child will be allowed to do for herself
- Where the parents will be

After the Procedure:

- What degree of pain to expect
- What medications the child will take
- Where the child will be taken
- What the child may not be able to do, and for how long
- What the child may look like, for example,
- Discolored skin
- Swelling
- An incision site
- A bandage or packing
- Intravenous medication apparatus
- Home care procedures after the child goes home

To help reassure a child before going to the hospital, discuss the following:

- People in the hospital are there to help when you need extra care.
- If you need to spend the night, sometimes your parents can stay with you.
- You can bring your favorite things from home.
- If something hurts or you are scared, let a grownup know.
- It's okay to ask about things you don't understand.
- Most hospitals have playrooms where you can play and meet friends.
- When you get home, you can draw a picture or tell your friends about your hospital stay or play hospital with your friends.