Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago®

Answering Tough Questions

Tips From a Child Life Specialist

It's common for your child to have questions before their surgery, but kids can sometimes surprise you with the questions they ask! It can be hard, as a caregiver, to answer some of these questions without feeling like you're overwhelming your child, or even feeling overwhelmed yourself. Our goal here is to help you answer their questions in a way that helps them better understand the process, feel safe, and is appropriate for their age.

We've listed below some common, and more challenging, questions kids ask – along with suggestions on how to respond. Remember, you know your child best! Use this information as a guide and use what you feel will be most helpful to your child. These responses are how a Child Life Specialist may answer these questions.

ANSWERING TOUGH QUESTIONS

"Why can't my family come back with me to the procedure room?"
"It's important that everyone is focused on you. Let's say that mom or dad comes back with you, but an accident happens where I bump my head or trip and fall. If mom or dad gets hurt in the procedure room, that means that someone who is supposed to be keeping you safe now has to keep *me* safe. All the doctors and nurses need to be focused only on you. It's also important to limit the amount of extra germs in the room. We try to keep this room as clean as possible!"

"Why can't I eat or drink before my procedure?"
"Sometimes, the anesthesia medicine can upset your stomach. If there's food or drink in your belly, there's a higher chance you could throw up when you're sleeping. This is not safe, so we want you to have an empty stomach before you come for a procedure. We know it can be ***so*** hard to be hungry! We will have lots of good stuff like popsicles and juice for you as soon as your procedure is done."

"What if I have to pee while I'm sleeping?"
"Remember that you won't have had anything to drink in a while, so your body probably won't have anything to pee out. Sometimes, feeling like we have to pee can actually be a sign that we're nervous. This is normal and happens to other kids and adults, too! We'll make sure you have time to pee before you go to the procedure room, and if an accident happens while you're sleeping with anesthesia, your doctors and nurses make sure you get cleaned up and dried off before you wake up. Accidents can happen to adults, too, and they would be treated the same way."

ANSWERING *TOUGHER* QUESTIONS

"Will it hurt? / Will I feel anything?"
"I know you're asking me that question because you want your body to feel safe. The job of the people who work at the hospital is to help keep your body safe, help it get strong, and help you be healthy! While the surgery is happening, you'll be asleep with anesthesia medicine. We use the word 'sleep', but it is a different type of sleep than what you do every night. You will not feel, hear, or see anything while you're sleeping with anesthesia because that is the anesthesia medicine's job. There are multiple doctors who are trained in using this medicine and will be with you the entire time to

keep you safe and asleep. After the surgery, you may notice that your body feels different. Some kids say weird, other kids say tired, and other kids say that something hurts. The doctors and nurses are going to work very, very hard to help you be as comfortable as possible, but you're the only one who can tell us how your body feels! If something hurts, tell us! Your family, the doctors and the nurses are all there to help you."

"Will I wake up during surgery?"
"The anesthesia team's job is to keep you asleep, safe, and comfortable the entire time the surgery is happening. That means watching your breathing, your heartbeat, your body temperature, and many other important things about your body the entire time you're asleep – every single second! They will continue to give you sleep medicine the entire time the surgery is happening, and will stop only when the surgeon says, "Okay, we're all done!" You will be asleep, safe, and comfortable the entire time the surgery is happening."

"Am I going to die?"
Note: We strongly encourage caregivers to manage their own emotional reaction to this question because your child pays very close attention to your emotional cues and non-verbal communication. This can be a startling question to hear from your child, but this is an opportunity to build trust, connection, understanding, and offer reassurance in your answer.

"I know you're asking me that question because you want to keep your body safe, so it's a very fair question to ask. Your body is healthy and strong. The doctors and nurses taking care of you have done this same surgery thousands of times, which means they're extra good at it. The people who work at Lurie Children's **only** take care of kids, which means they're *EXTRA* good at taking care of kids like you. The anesthesia team's job is to keep you asleep, safe, and comfortable. The surgeon's job is to help you *[add the reason for their surgery here, for example "breathe better" or "make your eyes stronger" or "check your belly from the inside" etc.]*. All of those people need our caregiver's permission to do this and we would not take you to a place that was going to hurt you. You will be asleep only for the part of the surgery where it may be uncomfortable or take a long time, and then you will wake up."

For more information or additional support from a Child Life Specialist, please email prepforsurgery@luriechildrens.org or call 312.227.3270