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# Helping Siblings Cope with Your Child's Surgery

When a child is having surgery, it's important to remember that siblings are also affected. They may not understand why their brother or sister needs surgery. Knowing what to expect can help them be more comfortable with the idea of surgery.



## How will siblings react?

These are common feelings that siblings may have when their brother or sister is having surgery:

- Fear that their brother or sister is very sick and may not come home from the hospital.
- Fear that no one will be around to take care of them when parents are with their brother or sister.
- Jealousy that their brother or sister gets more care and attention than they do.
- Guilt that they are jealous or thinking bad thoughts about their brother or sister.
- Guilt that they are well, and their brother or sister is sick.

## How can you help siblings cope with surgery?

Here are some ways to help siblings cope with surgery:

- Keep your emotions under control. Your children can sense how you're feeling. If you're upset, your children may respond in a similar way. Try to stay calm and relaxed.

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- Explain to siblings why their brother or sister needs surgery. Let them ask questions, and answer their questions truthfully.
  - Encourage siblings to talk about how they're feeling.
  - If possible, spend time with siblings apart from their brother or sister to reassure them that you care.
  - Keep routines at home and school as normal as possible. Be specific with siblings about who will take care of their needs when you're at the hospital. For instance, a relative may drive them to school and make them dinner.
  - Let siblings visit their brother or sister in the hospital.
  - Have siblings write cards, send email, or phone their brother or sister in the hospital if visits are not possible.

## **Child life specialist**

Many hospitals have a child life specialist. This person is specially trained to help children understand and cope with their hospital experience. Families can arrange to see a child life specialist when their child is scheduled for surgery. The child life specialist uses age-appropriate items, such as books, dolls, and toy medical or hospital equipment to explain surgery. It's helpful for parents and siblings to be part of these sessions.