Children and Anesthesia: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

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Limited cognitive skills
Dependence on others
Lack of self-control
Limited life experience
Poor understanding of healthcare system
Sources of fear

- Separation from parents
- Venipuncture
- Loss of control
- Change in routine
Behaviors that indicate poor coping

- Appear frightened
- Becoming agitated
- Breathing deeply
- Trembling
- Crying
- Stopping talking or playing
- Urination
- Increased motor tone
- Attempt to escape
Why is this important?
Children who display elevated anxiety prior to surgery are 3.5 times more likely to be at risk for development of negative postoperative behavior change.

After discharge...

Post-op Regressive Behavior Disturbances

60%

• Nightmares
• Sleep disorders
• Temper tantrums
• Aggression towards authority
• Separation anxiety
• Bedwetting
• Regression
Frequency of negative behaviors

- Day of Surgery
- POD-1
- POD-2
- POD-14

Stress point Timeline

- Child with mask no versed
- Child with IV
THE DREAM
WON'T LET GO

Ages 18 months to 4 years

Fear of Strangers

Not normal routine

New people
New environment
New expectations
WON’T LET GO

- Transitional objects (blankies, binkies, lovies)
- Parental presence when possible
- Less talking in the O.R.
- Familiar songs ABC’s, Twinkle twinkle
SCARED KIDS

School-aged children

Ages 5-9

Surgery as punishment
SCARED KIDS

School-aged children

Ages 5-9

- Fear of shots and needles
- Surgery as punishment
- Limited understanding
SCARED KIDS

- Rehearsal leading to sense of control
SCARED KIDS

- Rehearsal leading to sense of control
- Concrete explanations
- Small achievable tasks
I've never had anything this scary happen to me.

I don't know how to cope.
- Teach skills through example and concrete lessons
- Expect success and be confident
- Reinforce coping behaviors
THE NEGOTIATOR

I am freaking out

I have lost control

Stalling has worked before for me

Ages: ALL
THE NEGOTIATOR

- Steady eye contact
- Firm Limits
- Countdowns
Our culture doesn’t tell children these things.

I didn’t know how to tell them.

I didn’t want to upset them.

“Ages: ALL”
“WE DIDN’T TELL THEM”

- Find out why…
- Compromise on explanations
- Explain research
- Let it go…
COMMON THEMES

Seeking choices
Seeking control
Seeking validation
How can you adapt your practice?
We are not their families
We will see them briefly
We cannot fix them during our time together

We can keep them safe AND instill confidence in healthcare
We can have them feel successful

Be flexible
Be creative