

Wisdom Tooth Surgery and My Child with Autism

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Waiting

We're sitting in the waiting area amongst other parents whose children are having day surgery. Instead of my blue staff badge, today I have on the orange visitor badge. Today, I am all parent.

I have tried not to think about this day for years— ever since an X-ray confirmed that she did indeed have all four of those pesky wisdom teeth and that they'd eventually need to come out. Why do we even have them anymore? Haven't we evolved further than this?

We have been through many things with her that have caused us high anxiety- so this is not new- but it is never easy. It is however *easier* because we have learned to trust. To trust *the people* in whose hands we place our precious child, to trust *the process* that has been successful with many before us, to trust *ourselves* that we have prepared as best we can, and to trust *her* that she will do her part as best she can.

Not every teen/young adult with special needs will need oral surgery and/or to be in a hospital to have wisdom teeth taken out. Your dentist and other providers will help you decide what is best for your child. Her dentists at the Center for Pediatric Dentistry are the best. Dr. Travis Nelson has a "clinic within a clinic" for our kids with autism. Learn more from one of our heroes.

For those of you who will one day sit where I am now sitting, I offer the following tips:

Plan ahead

I planned time off from work in order to give her and me the time and attention needed for this. I didn't want to feel pulled in different directions so I made sure nothing of importance was scheduled close to her surgery.

Some people prefer not to know exactly what a procedure entails but I am not one of those people. I wanted to know every detail. I asked myriad questions about what our team was going to do so I could think through how to best accomplish them with her. I sought the input of other providers who also know her well so we could try and anticipate her reaction to various approaches.

Our biggest concerns were about sedation, being in recovery after surgery, and post-surgery pain management and oral care. We figured out a plan head of time and as it has played out, we made changes as needed. So far, it has gone remarkably well. I can breathe now.

Your team will lead you through each step. Keep in mind that this is what they do so well every day. They have done this with many, many children. They truly care about you and your child. That is so evident.

Read and carefully follow directions

Papers, lots of papers have come our way about today and more will come about home care. Read them! I almost forgot the directions about medication prior to surgery. You don't want to have to reschedule at the last minute so read at least a week ahead of time to make sure you are taking necessary steps in preparation for the day ahead. And if there is anything you don't understand, ask. I have received several different pieces of information that offer somewhat different advice so I am asking right now!

Recall past experiences

This is likely not the first challenging thing you've had to do with your child. Remember that you got through them and you will get through this. Will you be anxious? Yes, but that's to be expected. Call to mind a previous experience that went well. Hold on to that feeling of confidence as you go into this new one.

Expect that you will forget things

I'm pretty detail-oriented and have a good memory but when I'm anxious and in a new situation, I forget things. If providers only knew how very much we forget what they tell us and how hard it is for us to have to ask to have it repeated. Write things down even if you think you will remember it. If possible, have someone there with you to help keep track of what you've been told. Ask if you don't remember. No one will think you any less competent if you do. I already have asked twice what the plan is for after she wakes up.

Our pager just went off. She is waking up in recovery now. Time for me to stop blogging and be mama. My girl is waiting and oh, how she dislikes waiting!

We're home now so better write this down before it is all a blur . . .

Expect that there might be glitches

Even with all our preparation, we had a couple glitches. Not big ones, mostly miscommunication, but it did cause me some stress. Remember what I said about asking for clarification? I thought I understood one step but I didn't. In retrospect, it would have helped if I'd asked for a point person (there were so many people involved in her care today) to go to with questions. When I was unsure where to go when the pager went off, I got different answers from different people. A shift change led to some of the confusion.

Speak up

Staff were wonderful about asking us what we think would work best for her. They accommodated us as much as possible always keeping her safety and comfort as priorities. It might feel a bit strange in a room full of experts to take a lead role in handling your child but you are the expert in knowing your child. Ask for what you think will work. Be open to trying something different. Your team has the benefit of having done this with many other children – none exactly like yours – but similar to be sure.

Be patient. Be gentle. Be proud.

You are a great parent. You have a great kid. You have a great team. You have gotten through so much and this is one more thing you can handle. It won't be the easiest thing you've ever done but there isn't much about parenting that seems to come easy, except the unconditional love part, that is. Tuck this success away for future reference. It will come in handy.

Post Script

She was such a trooper! She did better than we could have ever imagined – and so did we. Her pain was minimal and she healed quickly. In fact, she was ready to eat that same evening. The hardest part was convincing her she had to go easy for a few days. She did though and we can breathe a sigh of relief that this is now done. Whew!

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