

# Elizabeth Fox, MEd, CCLS

DUAL MASTERS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION AND CHILD LIFE  
4 YEARS EXPERIENCE

*“Kind people are my kind of people”*

## **Can you tell me a little bit about your hospital and the units you cover?**

I work in a 358 bed, freestanding children's hospital; the only children's hospital covering 45,000 square miles! At this moment, I'm working on the Same Day Surgery unit, covering the ENT Clinic and Cardiology Clinic on a referral basis.

## **What's your typical unit census and about how many patients do you see per day?**

Our Same Day Surgery unit usually sees between 60-100 patients a day. We have 12 Operating Rooms going at the same time and 2 treatment rooms. Depending on other departmental responsibilities, I see an average of 4-12 patients a day.

## **What does your average day look like?**

I work Monday-Friday, 6:30am-3:00pm. When I arrive, I spend the first 30 minutes or so of my shift finishing my coffee, catching up on emails, checking the surgery schedule, seeing if there are any surgery holds in the Emergency Department, and planning my day. Then, I head up to the pre-op area and start triaging (prioritizing) patients. Because we see so many patients and there is just me, I have to constantly assess which patients would most likely benefit from our services. I tend to triage my patients based on age, procedures, RN's original assessment (if I've been able to talk to them), and previous surgical experiences. If a procedure is particularly invasive (colonoscopy, breast biopsies), or there is a lengthy admission afterwards (cardiac, scoliosis), I try to make those patients a priority. When I have downtime, here and there, I might check my email again or clean/organize my child life cabinet (that everyone in the department can access for toys, coloring pages, and stickers).

## **What is your favorite distraction item and how do you use it?**

My favorite distraction item is myself! I engage teenagers in conversations for IV starts, sing songs and go on "hunts" with smaller kids, and always have my light spinner in my pocket for a last resort! I also made iSpy-type badge buddies for my nursing staff (and myself!) to use in a pinch.

## **What's the best part about your job?**

The best part about my job is seeing a patient come in teary and scared, going in and doing a preparation and mask play with them, and watching them calm down and go off to surgery with a smile!

## **What's the hardest part in doing your job?**

The hardest part of my job is when a patient that I prepped and thought would cope beautifully, falls apart on the way to the OR. I always wonder what I could've done differently or better.

## **What's a facet of your job that people wouldn't expect?**

I think a lot of people don't expect that when I engage patients and families in normalizing conversation, I'm still assessing them. Just because it looks like I'm talking to them about school or video games doesn't mean that I'm not actively assessing their coping skills.

## **What's something you wish you knew when you started on this unit?**

I wish I could go back and tell myself that I **will** figure it out! When I started in surgery, I realized that the department ran like a moving train. I needed to figure out how to hop on and off at the right times without getting pulled under or missing the train entirely. I felt so overwhelmed when I started here – but with time and practice, I feel like I've really mastered jumping on this surgical train!

## **Do you have anything else you'd like to share about your job, tips for students, or thoughts?**

I feel like sometimes in child life, the emotional labor of the job can feel very overwhelming. I try to remind myself "Start where you are. Use what you have, Do what you can." I believe that every prospective child life specialist moves at their own pace and students shouldn't worry about how many rounds it took someone else to get an internship. Just as every patient is different, every student is different and we will all get to where we need to be in our own time and at our own pace.

