When your child needs medical treatment, you want him or her to have the very best care available. So it stands to reason that if your child needs an operation, you will want to consult with a surgeon who is qualified and experienced in operating on children. Surgeons who specialize in general surgery often provide surgical care for children, and they are fully qualified to perform many operations on children. In more urbanized areas of the country, another kind of surgeon—the pediatric surgeon—is also available to provide comprehensive surgical care for children.

Pediatric surgeons operate on children whose development ranges from the newborn stage through the teenage years. In addition to completing training and achieving board certification in general surgery, pediatric surgeons complete two additional years of training exclusively in children’s surgery. They then receive special certification in the subspecialty of pediatric surgery.

Surgery by Surgeons

A fully trained surgeon is a physician who, after medical school, has gone through years of training in an accredited residency program to learn the specialized skills of a surgeon. One good sign of a surgeon’s competence is certification by a national surgical board approved by the American Board of Medical Specialties. All board-certified surgeons have satisfactorily completed an approved residency training program and have passed a rigorous specialty examination.

The letters F.A.C.S. (Fellow of the American College of Surgeons) after a surgeon’s name are a further indication of a surgeon’s qualifications. Surgeons who become Fellows of the College have passed a comprehensive evaluation of their surgical training and skills; they also have demonstrated their commitment to high standards of ethical conduct. This evaluation is conducted according to national standards that were established to ensure that patients receive the best possible surgical care.
What is the pediatric surgeon’s role in treating the child?
Pediatric surgeons are primarily concerned with the diagnosis, preoperative, operative, and postoperative management of surgical problems in children. Some medical conditions in newborns are not compatible with a good quality of life unless these problems are corrected surgically. These conditions must be recognized immediately by neonatologists, pediatricians, and family physicians. Pediatric surgeons cooperate with all of the specialists involved in a child’s medical care to determine whether surgery is the best option for the child. 

What is the focus of pediatric surgery?
Pediatric surgeons utilize their expertise in providing surgical care for all problems or conditions affecting children that require surgical intervention. They participate in transplantation operations, and like most surgeons today, they use laparoscopic techniques for some operations. They also have particular expertise in the following areas of responsibility:

**Neonatal-**
- Pediatric surgeons have specialized knowledge in the surgical repair of birth defects, some of which may be life threatening to premature and full-term infants.

**Prenatal-**
- Pediatric surgeons, in cooperation with radiologists, use ultrasound and other technologies during the fetal stage of a child’s development to detect any abnormalities. They can then plan corrective surgery and educate and get to know parents before their baby is born.

**Trauma-**
- Because trauma is the number one killer of children in the United States, pediatric surgeons are routinely faced with critical care situations involving traumatic injuries sustained by children that may or may not require surgical intervention.
- Many pediatric surgeons are involved in accident prevention programs in their communities that are aimed at curbing traumatic injuries in children.

**Pediatric Oncology-**
- Pediatric surgeons are involved in the diagnosis and surgical care of children with malignant tumors as well as those with benign growths.

Where do pediatric surgeons work?
Pediatric surgeons practice their specialty in a variety of medical institutions, including children’s hospitals, university-related medical centers with major pediatric services, and large urban community hospitals.

How are pediatric surgeons trained and certified?
Pediatric surgeons must have graduated from an accredited medical school and must have completed five years of graduate surgical education in an accredited general surgery residency program. Then, they must complete two additional years of full-time education in an approved fellowship program in pediatric surgery. Following completion of their two-year study in the subspecialty of pediatric surgery, they must pass a written examination to ensure that their surgical knowledge is of the highest level and an oral exam to determine their ability to manage a variety of surgical problems in infants and children. In order to take this examination, they must first become board certified in general surgery. After these requirements have been fulfilled, surgeons are granted a special certificate in the subspecialty of pediatric surgery. This certificate must be renewed every 10 years to ensure that every pediatric surgeon is competent and up-to-date with regard to advances in pediatric surgical care.

What differences can a pediatric surgeon make?
Pediatric surgeons specialize in the surgical care of children. They are surgeons who, by training, are oriented toward working with children and understanding their special needs. In addition, they work with various specialists who are also oriented toward children and toward providing high-quality, safe, and emotionally supportive care for their patients. When a pediatric surgeon performs an operation, it is the culmination of an orderly and detailed process involving pediatricians, family physicians, and other medical specialists who work together to treat the whole child.

For pediatric surgeons, one of the most satisfying and fulfilling aspects of their profession is that the majority of their patients will live long into the 21st century. Pediatric surgeons are able to save whole lifetimes, and have the opportunity to follow their patients through a productive young life into adulthood.