

Mom, Dad...Don't Be Nervous for Me at the Dentist

Every day we see many of our parents concerned for their children on the first, second and even third dental visit. We invite parents to be a part of their children's health and show concern for their teeth, but one too many times we have those parents that may show a little of their own nervousness while their child is in the chair. We would like to cover some of the most frequent mishaps that our parents have made to get you ready for your child's next dental visit!

Many people develop a phobia for the dentist at a very young age. Sometimes children come in and explain that they are afraid because their parents have told them, "If you don't behave, the doctor will give you a shot!" I know that we may believe this should make them cooperate, but in turn it only paints a negative picture of the dentist – the same dentist you will be driving them to the same day. Other children see a parent's reaction or hear negative stories of their parent's experiences and feel that this will also happen to them.

"Does that hurt?" "Are you ok?" "Is the Doctor hurting you?" "Wow! Is that needle going into his/her mouth?" These are some of the innocent comments that parents make when they are observing the doctors while their children are being treated. We understand that it is only natural for someone to make these remarks, but they do harm your child and the trust between the child and the doctor at that moment.

It is ok to feel uneasy at the dentist with your child. Not knowing the process or what the results of the exam would be, or seeing what you yourself would be so afraid of going through that you just can't help but react. This is an opportunity to turn things around and give your child a better experience than what you have had. You must let your child develop their own opinions. Children are like sponges! They see, feel, hear and react to both positive and negative influences. Allow the doctor to treat the patient and explain things in such a way that they will understand and feel comfortable dealing with. Sometimes, it is not necessary for them to know that the doctor "Will be using a sharp, pointy instrument to count their teeth," or "Close your eyes, here comes the big needle!" We have our own way of allowing the patient to know enough information about what we will be doing to gain their confidence and trust and most importantly, to allow us to enter their personal space to treat them.

Mom and Dad are an important part of helping to put a child at ease before arriving and at the dentist. Here are a couple of pointers: Always start them off visiting the dentist at a young age. This will allow them to be familiar with the atmosphere, the dental chair, over-head light, instruments used, and most importantly, the ability to establish a relationship with their doctor. Suggestion: Pick up children's books that show pictures of a dental office, that will describe the

sounds they may hear and will talk about and show the process. Second, talk us up! Inform them of where they are going, mention the doctor's name and remind them of their last positive experience at a doctor's office. Third, let them know ahead of time what the process is. An assistant may want to take pictures of their teeth to see if any bacteria (aka "bugs") are living in their mouth, the doctor will ask them to open wide (practice this with them – it can be fun!), then they will count and point at their teeth with an instrument that does not hurt at all, and with that, we can make sure that they are in good dental health. Fourth, if other treatment is involved, ask the doctor what the process is so that in between appointments you can already start to talk to your child about what will happen on their next visit. The more you talk about it, the less they will be afraid because the topic something they are unfamiliar with.

The scariest part is the unknown. Once you educate yourself, you will be more at ease with the treatment of your child and in turn can give them better information about their behavior.

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