

A Child's First Trip to the Dentist:

Advice for Parents



- **Start early.** Healthy teeth start at home. Brush your child's teeth after meals and especially before bedtime, even babies. Provide healthy snacks and plenty of fluoridated water, limiting sweets and sugary drinks. Children as young as one are encouraged to go to the dentist. If your child is older, it's never too late to begin seeing the dentist!
- **Be prepared.** Choose a dental clinic that is comfortable working with young children. Before setting an appointment, ask staff how they treat children. Once the appointment is made, write down the appointment date and time (missed appointments are costly for the dentist and many clinics have rules on missing them). Gather your child's insurance information, medication list and health history to help with paperwork.
- **Play and pretend.** Before your child's appointment, find children's books about going to the dentist and read them with your child. Play pretend dentist with them, allowing the child to examine your teeth or a doll's teeth. Practice with your child to "open wide" and familiarize them with "top, bottom, front and back." It's also a good idea to bring your child to your regular dental exam. The tools, lights and dental staff are new to your child and can be scary. Seeing them before the child's appointment helps them with their fears.
- **Be brief.** Talking too much or sharing too much information may only frighten your child. Tell a young child the morning of their visit or even on the way to the visit. Keep conversation positive and light. Use terms like "count teeth, polish your teeth and refer to dental staff as 'our friends at the dentist.'" Stay away from terms like "yank, hurt or shots" and **NEVER** threaten your child with a visit to the dentist or use the visit as punishment.
- **Be comforting and reassuring.** During the appointment, ask the dental staff where you should sit. Some clinics encourage parents to hold the child in the parent's lap or to hold the child's hand. A special blanket, stuffed animal or doll may also help. It is normal for a child to wiggle, whine or cry. When they do, speak with them in a calm voice reassuring them about what is happening.
- **Follow Through.** It is important to follow the dentist's instructions for after the appointment. Sometimes there may be a follow-up appointment or special care to follow at home. It's also okay to ask about the instructions twice, so you understand what to do or have it written down.
- **Have fun!** Set up a fun activity for after the appointment as incentive for making it through—tears or not!

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For more information on children's dental care or how to access dental care in west central Minnesota see our website: ecdn.wcif.org