



TIP SHEET

Choosing a Dental Provider for Your Child with Special Needs

Getting off to a good start with your dental provider sets the groundwork for your child to learn good lifelong oral health habits. Following are some tips to help you identify the dental provider that will best meet your family's needs.

Find out if opportunities are available for desensitization or educational visits.

Many offices will allow you to visit prior to the scheduled appointment. During this session, the hygienist or dentist will engage with your child in the "Tell-Show-Do" technique encouraged by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. Your child will see and learn about dental instruments, preparing him/her for how the instrument will be used during the dental appointment.

Ask if the dentist has experience serving children with special needs.

Many dentists participate in educational seminars addressing the needs of children who have anxiety or children who have behavioral needs. Check to see if your dentist has completed any of this extensive credentialing.

Inquire about bringing comfort items for your child.

A game, movie or stuffed animal can comfort your child during a dental visit. Check with your provider to determine their flexibility with the presence of your child's comfort item during the appointment.

Schedule the appointment so your child does not have to wait.

Time spent in the waiting area can provoke anxiety for some children. Unexpected sounds, smells and people can create stress that carries over to the child's time with the dental provider. Ask if your dental provider can accommodate your child's needs by guaranteeing that he or she will be able to skip the waiting room.

Ask if you can see the same professional and be treated in the same room.

Many children have difficulty with transitions and changes in environments. Maintaining the same provider or room can decrease the anxiety and difficulties associated with new places and people.

Discuss your child's medications and how they may affect his/her dental care.

Medication interactions for children with special needs are an important matter. Be sure to discuss medications that your child is taking with your dental provider frequently.

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