

# Help Little Smiles Learn About the Dentist

Preparing parents and children for success during their first dental visit.



Your child's first dental visit should take place within six months of when the first tooth appears, but no later than the first birthday. Even if you've missed this timeframe, it's never too late! Make an appointment for your child to see a pediatric dentist and help them develop good oral health habits that will last throughout their lives. Here are a few tips to help your first visit go smoothly.

- 1 Explain what will happen during the visit to teach your child what to expect. Watch some related videos or read books together to make the process less mysterious.
- 2 Answer all of your child's questions positively and avoid using "scary" words. Most first visits and preventive exams have nothing to do with the words "hurt," "shot," "needle" or "drill," so don't even bring them up!
- 3 Never talk about a trip to the dentist as punishment for bad behavior. Seeing the dentist is just another part of keeping children healthy, and you want your child to form positive associations with regular care.
- 4 A parent will never be far away! If your child isn't able — or doesn't want — to sit in the dental chair alone, you will sit in it with them, holding the child while the dentist completes the exam.
- 5 If you have a toddler who hasn't seen the dentist before, you may want to schedule a "practice visit" so your child can get acquainted with the dentist, the office and the equipment before it's time for the real thing. Many pediatric dental offices welcome these visits!
- 6 Schedule the appointment at a time when your child is well-rested and cooperative. Avoid naptimes!
- 7 Give your child a light meal before the appointment so they won't be hungry. Make sure to help them brush their teeth afterwards and save any snacks for after the exam!
- 8 If your child gets upset during the exam, work with the dentist to calm them. Remember, you and your dentist are on the same team, and you want your child to start building a positive relationship with the dentist and preventive care.