

Homework to Prepare for a Dental Appointment

Use practice, praise, and play to help your child feel more comfortable with a dental appointment.

Practice these steps when your child is in a happy mood. Try to work on the steps a little every day for multiple days or weeks.

First Steps:

- Talk about how nice the dentist and hygienist are. (Example: I love how the dentist makes sure my teeth are healthy.)
- If you have a photo preparation book or video, review it with your child daily, starting a week before the appointment.
- Play with matching cards showing items used at the dentist (get pictures from books or websites and cut into cards).



Next Steps:

- If your child does not like having his/her mouth area touched, model by gently patting around your mouth, “Look how Mommy is touching her face. Now it is your turn.” Then pat around your child’s mouth (sing a made up song to make it fun). When you are touching around your child’s mouth, have your child keep his/her hands on his/her lap (this is good practice for the dental appointment).
- Practice opening the mouth for 5 seconds.
- Practice with small mirror near the mouth just at the front teeth.
- Practice counting teeth with your clean finger. When you are counting your child’s teeth, have your child keep hands on his/her lap.

Final Steps:

- Ease into using a toothbrush. Let your child feel it on his/her fingers, then in the mouth when ready.
- First model the action yourself (e.g. “Look how mommy is opening her mouth big.”) You can also model some of this using a doll, a stuffed animal or even Thomas the Train. “Look how Mommy is counting Cinderella’s teeth...1, 2, 3...” Once your child is comfortable, slowly ease into having him/her doing it himself/herself (e.g. “Now it is your turn. Open your mouth big.”)

- Give your child a break between each step.
- Praise your child for being calm and cooperative. If necessary, use a reward system for cooperative behavior.
- If your child tries to push your hands away, redirect your child's hands with a fun activity. For example, tell your child to hold his toy car or clap his hands during a favorite song.
- These steps could challenge your child, but if your child becomes upset, take a break and try again later.

Teaming up with a Therapist

If a therapist works with your child, ask the therapist to work on this homework with your child too.

Coping Skills

While preparing for a dental appointment and during the appointment, encourage your child to use coping skills. Coping skills can be used with anything that is difficult for your child. Let your child know these are ways to calm the body and feel better. Choose a coping or relaxation method that you think your child will respond to best:

- Deep breathing - Have your child take 3-5 deep breaths. Encourage your child to watch his or her stomach rise and fall. Blow bubbles or blow into a pinwheel to encourage deep breathing.
- Counting - Count to 10 with your child and encourage participation.
- Pressure - Have your child squeeze both hands together or around a ball. Repeat five times.
- Listen to music – Play soothing music for your child to hear.
- Watch a video - Encourage your child to watch a favorite video to remain calm.
- Picture a favorite place or activity - Describe in detail your child's favorite activity or place and ask your child to imagine it.

