

## Happy and Successful Dental Visits for Children

Both parents and dentists want happy and successful dental appointments for young children. Have you ever considered how difficult to get a 3 or 4 year old to sit still for an hour. Now think about having to do complex dental procedures on that child, who is awake and possibly frightened. The following are suggestions that help in my office to routinely accomplish what seems impossible.

1. Bring your child to the dentist for easy exams and cleanings starting in their 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year; hopefully before any significant problems develop. A dental emergency makes a very bad way to start your child's dental experience.
2. Do not try to prepare your child mentally by describing what may occur at the appointment. Parents often unintentionally scare their child or transfer their own fears to the child when trying to explain dental procedures.
3. Do not act like your child's dental visit is a "big deal". If the child thinks it is a big deal, due to parents talking about bravery or promising special treats, problems are more likely.
4. Schedule your young child's appointment in the morning when they are freshest. The worst times are nap time or late afternoon.
5. Pat your child on the head and send them back for treatment while you wait bravely in the lobby. It isn't easy on you, but your child will usually be less afraid and cooperate better.
6. If you do accompany your child to the treatment room, be prepared to leave if your child doesn't cooperate. Remember that your goal and mine is to successfully and gently accomplish the treatment goals.
7. Young children (and nervous adults) often benefit from sedation. Nitrous oxide (laughing gas) provides safe, light conscious sedation. This helps them relax but does not put them to sleep and does not make an uncooperative child cooperate.
8. At my office, we have children watch TV or DVD's during treatment. This provides excellent distraction. A favorite DVD from home can be very helpful.
9. Children who cannot or will not cooperate will need to be referred to a pediatric dentist for deep sedation or to be put to sleep in the hospital, both of which involve more risk (and expense) than nitrous oxide.
10. Parents really need to watch children after the appointment. Kids will sometimes chew on a numb lip or tongue and do significant damage.

With these suggestions, most preschoolers can be successfully treated with out deep sedation or being put to sleep. Many kids can actually enjoy their dental visits!