

Kids in Space War

Why do you think most kids end up needing braces? For most kids, it is because they have lost the “space war”. In other words, they don’t have enough space in their jaws to get all their permanent teeth in straight. This condition is called “crowding” and it is the most common reason for needing braces.

Do all kids have a shortage of space? No, some have the right amount of space (if managed properly) and some actually have too much space. The majority, however, do not have enough space to get all their teeth in straight.

What does a space problem look like? Crowding usually first appears about age 6, when the very first permanent teeth start coming in. If either the upper or lower front teeth come in crooked or in back of the baby teeth, then a significant crowding problem is starting to develop.

Are there ways to win the space battle and reduce the need for braces later? Yes, there are several things that parents can and should do. First, start your kids seeing the dentist early. Three years old is the age I like to start seeing children. By this age many youngsters already have cavities.

Second, your dentist you select should have the knowledge and desire to manage space problems in children. An informed and motivated family (general) dentist or pediatric dentist will partner with you to help manage any dental problems your child might have.

Third, work with your dentist to help take care of your child’s baby teeth. One of the best ways to create or worsen a space problem is to loose a back tooth because of decay. If one must be lost, a “space maintainer” made immediately will prevent space loss.

Fourth, if space has already been lost, sometimes a “space regainer” followed by a space maintainer can head off a problem that would cause or complicate braces later.

So if proper dental care and space maintenance are done, can the need for braces be eliminated? The answer is often yes. However, in many children the difference in the size of the permanent teeth and the space available are just too great. For those kids, braces would still be needed, but the orthodontic treatment would be significantly faster and easier.

So all you parents (and grandparents) become “space warriors” with your kids and they will benefit from it.