What to Expect On the Day of Your Child’s First Dental Treatment

The first dental treatment appointment is an adventure for your child. Many children are afraid of new surroundings and the unexpected, and they deal with this anxiety in different ways. Some children cope well, allowing us to easily work on their teeth during the appointment. Other children can be more apprehensive and will not respond to our words of reassurance.

Our Staff and Doctors are here to help your child develop a positive dental attitude at an early age. We want to help make this appointment a good experience, so here are some hints and tips that may help you to prepare your child for his/her next dental visit.

Before the Visit

You can show your child what they can expect by reading to them books like The Berenstain Bears Visit the Dentist or Going to the Dentist (more books are shown on our website www.PediatricDentistSF.com).

Please do not use words like “hurt” or “shot” or “needle”. We use less threatening words like “sleepy juice” to help children cope and control their anxiety.

For children younger than 4 years of age, early morning appointments are recommended. Young children do better in the mornings after a good night’s rest and will hopefully behave better during the visit.

Please help us by not providing any food or drinks two hours before the appointment. When a child is very apprehensive and cries, they can swallow a lot of air which may cause them to vomit.

Bring an extra change of clothes, diapers, or pull ups just in case of any “accidents.”

During the Appointment

In most cases of dental treatment, local anesthetic is necessary to numb the teeth. For the majority of children, this is a new and uncomfortable sensation which may be a little scary. Young children are unable to vocalize their fears and their only way to communicate will be to get away from the source of discomfort (our dental team). Children may cry, try to run away, or stay close (cling) to you where they feel safe.

If your child becomes increasingly uncooperative, we may ask you to step out of your child’s field of vision and quietly be a silent observer. Many children will be more cooperative with their parents out of sight.

However, some children are so uncooperative that we need to use a wrap called a Papoose Board that will help prevent your child from moving. This wrap acts like a swaddling blanket, helping to prevent possible injury to your child, the dental assistant, or the Doctor.

If you can remain calm and supportive of your child and the dental team during the treatment, it will be a more pleasant experience for everyone involved.

After the Appointment

After any dental work where your child has been anesthetized (numbed), please watch that your child does not scratch or bite his/her cheek, lip, or tongue while it feels “different”. Younger patients who are not familiar with the effects of local anesthesia may say that “it hurts” when in fact this new feeling of numbness does not hurt, just that his/her face feels big or fat. Your child may also want to scratch his/her face because there is a tingling sensation as the anesthetic is wearing off.

A soft diet and careful monitoring for about 2-3 hours is recommended.

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