Helping Your Child Feel Comfortable at the Dentist

Strategies to ease dental anxiety and make visits positive.

Based on Nervous About The Dentist by Cool Mountain Kids Pediatric Dentistry

Step 1: Understand Your Child's Anxiety

Recognize common sources of dental anxiety such as fear of the unknown, past negative experiences, sensory triggers, fear of pain, or loss of control. Understand that each child's anxiety is unique.

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Step 2: Prepare Your Child Before the Visit

Use simple, positive language when discussing the appointment. Avoid words like 'hurt' or 'pain.' For younger children, use phrases like 'count your teeth' or 'make them sparkly clean.' For older children, explain the hygienist will clean hard-to-reach places or that the dentist will check their growing teeth.

- For younger children: 'The dental chair is like a spaceship that goes up and down!'
- For older children: 'They'll take pictures of your teeth to make sure they're growing properly.'

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Step 3: Practice at Home

Play 'pretend dentist' at home. Take turns being the dentist and patient with stuffed animals. Practice lying still, opening the mouth wide, and counting teeth to build familiarity and confidence.

- Read children's books about dental visits to normalize the experience and address fears.

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Step 4: Engage in the Waiting Room

Use games to distract your child and create positive associations. Play 'I Spy' with dental-themed items or create a 'Tooth Fairy Treasure Hunt' with clues leading to a reward.

- 'I spy something that keeps your teeth clean' (toothbrush)
- Hide tooth-shaped paper cutouts with clues or riddles.

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Step 5: Use Calming Techniques During the Visit

Practice deep breathing exercises. Use a small stuffed animal on their tummy to help them visualize slow, controlled breaths. Establish secret signals for communication between you and your child.

- Signals: Raise a finger for a break, thumbs up for okay, hand squeeze for anxiety.

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Step 6: Leverage Technology

Utilize apps for oral care and relaxation. Apps like 'Brush DJ' or 'Disney Magic Timer' make brushing fun. 'Calm Kids' or 'Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame' can teach breathing and emotional regulation.

• Apps can make home oral care fun, improving attitudes toward professional visits.

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Step 7: Choose a Child-Friendly Dental Practice

Select a pediatric dentist experienced in handling anxious children. Look for practices with a child-focused environment, engaging activities, and a team that connects with children individually.

Resources & Further Reading

Related guides for this process:

- Turning Dental Anxiety into Smiles for Kids (Infographic)

https://storage.googleapis.com/pediatric-dentistry-checklists-20260707-64863c/pediatric-dentistry/Infographic/nervous-about-the-dentist-infographic.pdf

- Action Sheet: Helping Your Child With Dental Anxiety

https://storage.googleapis.com/pediatric-dentistry-checklists-20260707-8878a5/pediatric-dentistry/Action%20Sheet/nervous-about-the-dentist-action-sheet.pdf

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Positive preparation and playful engagement can transform dental visits into comfortable experiences.