Bringing Smiles to Children with Special Health Care Needs

Children with special health care needs often have more severe dental problems, and their increased anxiety can present challenges. Dentists and family members can overcome many obstacles by working together on regular dental checkups. A team effort will help make the visit go smoothly.

The key is preparation. Complete as much as possible before arriving at the dentist's office.

- Make sure the dentist knows in advance about any physical conditions, medications, allergies and behavior concerns.
- Alert the dental staff about any sensitivity to bright lights, sounds or being touched.
- Fill out paperwork ahead of time to avoid delays in the waiting area where a child could become anxious.
- Whenever possible, the child should sit in the same chair during each dental checkup, and the examination should be handled by the same staff members.

Consistency earns a child's trust. Following a routine helps them grow more confident with each visit. Everyone who helps make checkups easy and successful will be rewarded with bright smiles for years to come.

Did you know?

More than 11 million children in the United States have special health care needs.[1]

Quick bites

Remember the following tips when creating a daily oral care routine for a child with special health care needs:

- Maintain a positive attitude, and make it as fun as possible
- Choose a comfortable location with adequate lights
- Organize toothbrushes, toothpaste, rinses and floss before you begin
- Use picture books, puppets or toys to demonstrate
- Brush teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste
- Give lots of encouragement and reassurance
- Keep a list for other caregivers of what works and what doesn't, including preferences and comfort items

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1 Maternal and Child Health Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "The National Survey of Children with Special Health Care Needs Chartbook 2009–2010," web.

Healthy Smile, Happy Life

Delta Dental of Arkansas, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, and Tennessee

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