

How to Make a Dental Visit a Positive Experience



TIPS FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

Children under two years of age cannot easily understand spoken explanations so it is up to the parents to be calm and prepared for dental visits. To help younger child have a positive experience, parents can:

- Stay calm during the child's appointment so they can effectively soothe the child, if needed. Children can become fussy or stressed if their caregiver is stressed, angry, or scared.
- Ask what services may be performed during the dental visit, before and throughout the dental visit.
- Bring the child's favorite blanket and a toy to keep the child comfortable and entertained.
- Brush and floss their child's teeth twice daily and avoid sugary beverages, which will help prevent tooth decay and make dental visits easier.

TIPS FOR OLDER CHILDREN

Once children can speak and understand spoken explanations, parents can set realistic expectations by explaining what will happen before the dental visit. To help older children have a positive experience, parents can:

- Talk to the child about what to expect at the dental visit, using positive words like "clean," "strong," and "healthy" to describe dental visits. Parents should avoid using words like "hurt" or "pain."
- Answer the child's questions directly but briefly. If the child asks a difficult question such as whether a procedure will be painful, parents can say, "I don't know, but let's ask the dentist when we get there." Dental providers, especially those who work with children, know how to explain dental procedures to children.
- Avoid sharing their own painful experiences about going to the dentist with the child.
- Roleplay going to the dental visit with the child. For example, the parent and child can take turns sitting in a chair while the "dentist" gives a checkup.
- Reassure the child that they will be present during the visit.
- Talk with their child about the importance of twice daily brushing and flossing, and avoiding sugary foods and beverages to keep teeth healthy and strong, which will make dental visits easier.

DENTAL VISIT SCENARIOS

Use the tips above to brainstorm phrases that promotoras can use with parents in the following examples.



1. Diego has his first preventive dental visit. He is 10 months old and his mother is concerned about how he will act during the dental visit.



2. Maya is a six-year-old getting ready for her first preventive dental visit. Maya wants her father to tell her what will happen at the dental visit.