How to Evaluate Online Information

WHAT IS THE SOURCE?

Overall, websites from government agencies, professional organizations, universities, hospitals, and academic journals contain information based on research. Examples include:

- The American Academy of Pediatric Dentists (www.aapd.org)
- The National Institute of Oral and Craniofacial Research (www.nidcr.nih.gov)
- The resources section of the Dientes Fuertes, Vida Sana website (www.dientesfuertes.com)
- Johns Hopkins Medicine (www.hopkinsmedicine.org)

WHO IS THE AUTHOR?

The source should be written by someone with credentials, such as professional experience or a degree appropriate to the topic. For example, if you want to direct parents to additional information about how sugar damages teeth, an appropriate author may be a pediatric dentist. (Note: Websites for professional organizations, such as the American Dental Association, usually do not list specific authors but the information is vetted and reviewed by the organization.)

IS THE SOURCE CURRENT?

Scientific information, including medical information, may change as new research is published. Ensure that you have the latest available information. Websites sometimes have a copyright date or a "last updated" or "last modified" date. These dates are often located at the bottom of the home page.

DOES THE SOURCE CONTAIN CITATIONS?

In general, sources with citations suggest that the information is based on research. A citation can be in parentheses (Moyer, V.A., 2014) or a footnote.[1]

[1] Moyer, V. A. (2014). *Prevention of dental caries in children from birth through age 5 years: US Preventive Services Task Force recommendation statement. Pediatrics, 133(6), 1102-1111.*

IS THE SOURCE OBJECTIVE?

Sources that are emotionally or financially connected to the subject may not be reliable. For example, a parents' blog devoted to how to obtain medical or dental care for children may feature personal experiences rather than reliable, current information based on research.

KEEP IN MIND

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between reliable (based on science) and unreliable (not based on science) sources. Unreliable sources frequently

- Argue that there is a conspiracy in the scientific community to silence views that contradict established knowledge
- Rely on fake experts who do not have a credible track record
- Present only information (e.g. citations) that supports their opinion