

Preparing for the Dental Visit

Finding the Right Dental Office

It is important to find a dentist that works successfully with individuals with autism. You may find a dentist in your local area in the Autism Speaks Resource Guide. (www.AutismSpeaks.org/community/resources)

You may want to find out if the dentist has a questionnaire that you can fill out before your appointment. If not, you can use the one provided in this guide.

Speak with the dentist before the appointment.

- Let the dentist know what time of day works best for your child.
- Describe any concerns or challenges that may present themselves during the visit.
- See if they have pictures of the office so you can review them with your child before the appointment.

Preparing for the Dental Visit

You may want to prepare your child before going to the dentist. For some children, a visual schedule can be helpful to let them know what will happen throughout the visit. *You can find information about visual schedules on page 6, and you can find an actual visual schedule on page 7 of this Guide.* You can also practice having your child sit in a reclining chair. You may have to teach each of the following steps so that they understand the directions from the dental professional.

- Putting their hands on their stomach
- Putting their feet out straight
- Opening wide
- Holding their mouth open
- Counting their teeth
- Cleaning with a power brush
- Taking X-Rays
- Spitting into the sink



Each step may need to be mastered individually. Many of the instruments used at a dental visit can be bought at a drugstore. These would include:

- Small flashlight
- Dental mirror
- Rubber-tipped gum massager

You may also be able to get some dental bite wings from their dentist in advance of the visit, so that your child may practice biting down on the dental bite wings when they need to have X-Rays taken.

Visual Schedule

Individuals with autism often benefit from visual supports and schedules. The following visual schedule outlines the steps necessary for a dental visit. Families are welcome to print the pictures and create a visual schedule for their child. Some families may print the page and check off the activities as they occur. The pages can be laminated and a dry erase marker can be used to check off each activity, this way the page can be reused for each visit. Others may cut out the photos and laminate them, and place Velcro on the back of each photo. The photos are arranged in chronological order on a board, as each step is completed the picture is removed.

Some children may need to be reinforced with verbal praise, a preferred item, or a reward after each step. Others may be able to complete some, many or all of the steps before verbal praise or a reward is given. Each child will need to work at their own pace to achieve the skills necessary for a dental visit.



Visual Schedule for a Dentist Visit



1 Put hands on stomach



2 Feet out straight



3 Open mouth wide



4 Hold mouth open



5 Count teeth



6 Take X-Rays



7 Clean teeth



8 Spit into sink

Going to Dentist

Meeting the Dentist

Your child will most likely meet the dentist in the waiting area. You may want to call ahead to see if the dentist is running on time. If they are delayed and you think that your child may be anxious in the waiting area, you may want to ask the receptionist if you could wait in the car, and ask them to call you on your cell phone when the dentist is ready. Bring a favorite toy or reward for a job well done. You may also want to bring a family member, teacher, or autism expert to help make the visit a success.

