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How Can I Best Help My Child? Tips for Parents of Dental Patients

Feelings shape our actions! Your child looks to you when deciding how to feel about a dental appointment. The advice included here is the result of 25+ years of research from Barbara Sheller, DDS, MSD of how parents can best help children cooperate for dental treatment. Some of these ideas may surprise you! Thank you for your help in creating a great dental experience for your child.

Parent Actions and Comments that Help Children Cooperate:

1. Calm, relaxed, and upbeat parent attitude and body language
2. Happy facial expressions
3. Positive stories or comments about your own dental experiences
4. Showing no doubt that your child will enjoy the dental visit and make you proud
5. Parent stays silent when the dentist and staff is talking to the child and allows their child to answer questions from the dentist and staff
6. Bringing something small that your child likes to the appointment (ex Stuffed animal)
7. Before and after the appointment, talk about things which direct the child's attention to something pleasant (ex Pets, toys, stories, food, movies, television, friends)
8. Bring a joke or silly riddle to tell the dentist (Laughing will relax everyone)
9. Planning a small reward for your child after a successful appointment
10. Take a picture of the smiling child after the appointment and send to grandparents

Parent Actions and Comments that Upset Children and Interfere with Cooperation:

1. Stressed, hurried, or anxious parent attitude or body language
2. Negative or scary stories and comments about dental treatment or appointments
3. Uninformative reassuring comments ("Don't worry")
4. Informative reassuring comments ("You're almost done")
5. Criticism ("Why can't you be like your sister?")
6. Apology ("I'm sorry this is taking so long")
7. Empathy ("You must be getting tired")
8. Suggestions to the dentist ("He does better when he knows what is going to happen")
9. Intimidation ("You are seriously going to harm yourself")
10. Inappropriate or confusing comments ("Does that hurt?")

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