

Caring for a Child with Dental Anxiety

Children, like adults, have different fears, phobias and tolerances. Some may feel completely at ease when visiting the dentist and some may need a little more reassurance. This advice sheet is aimed to give parents/carers of children who may be nervous some tips about how to reduce this anxiety when coming to the dentist.

1. **Let us know.** You can call up and ask our receptionist to put a note on your child's file. The dentist will then be aware of this when your child attends for their appointment and you will not have to discuss it in front of your child.
2. Dentists try to **avoid words** such as 'hurt,' 'needle' or 'pain' as this can create fear. It is important that children are not told that they will feel pain during dental treatment. If a treatment is likely to be uncomfortable, the dentist can give some local anaesthetic in the area to ensure that the patient does not feel pain. If your child asks whether their treatment will be painful, you can reassure them that the treatment may be uncomfortable but not painful, and that they are in control and the dentist will stop if they raise their hand.
3. **Bringing** a favourite teddy or blanket to hold in the chair is sometimes a comfort to younger children.
4. In the days before your child's appointment, **explain** to them that you are going to visit the dentist together, and **what they can expect.** For example if they are having treatment then the dentist will squirt water on their teeth and the nurse will suck the water up again. Ensuring that a calm and positive tone is used when talking about the dentist can help to reassure anxious children.
5. We have **stress balls** available for nervous patients – if your child would like to hold one just ask.
6. **Reducing sugary snacks** to mealtimes only (remembering that even fruits and juices contain natural sugar) and **brushing twice** daily can reduce the need for children to have treatment. There is more advice available in our tooth decay leaflet on our website.