

Let's go to the dentist!

Going to the dentist is an essential part of our lives. Sometimes it can also be a stressful time for families. If you have concerns about going to the dentist with your child, here are some ideas we hope will help.



Before the appointment

If you are concerned about **physical access and amenities**, call beforehand and talk to the hairdressers about your access needs. You may also choose to **contact the dental office** first to discuss any concerns or challenges that may arise and discuss a plan to address these.

Talking with others about your child's disability can sometimes be difficult - what you choose to share with others is entirely up to you. The information you do choose to share may help others develop good relationships with your child and better understand how they can help your child in different environments.

You may choose to share the Shaping Outcomes *disability factsheets, participation checklist* and/or *inclusion tips* with the dental staff.

You can prepare your child by:

- ❖ Reading stories or watching videos about going to the dentist
- ❖ Playing and practicing what happens at the dentist
- ❖ Using visual supports to prepare your child for what will happen (eg photos of the dentist, equipment that will be used, a visual schedule to understand the order of events)
- ❖ Developing a social story for your child about going to the dentist
- ❖ Visiting with your child before the appointment - so your child is more familiar with the environment
- ❖ Letting your child watch someone else first - if you or another family member will be having a dental visit, bring your child so they can see what happens.

By understanding **what will happen** and **what is expected of them**, your child will feel less anxious or confused.

Be prepared with supports for your child's **sensory needs** – you may wish work with your early intervention specialist to develop a sensory profile for you child.

Consider **calling ahead** to see if the dentist is running on time. If they are delayed and your child may be anxious in the waiting area, you may choose to wait in the car, and request that you be called when the dentist is ready.

Plan to keep your child **engaged and interested** while you're at the dentist. Take your child's favourite toy or have a reward to keep your child motivated. You may find it helpful to have a family member or friend come along to help.

Plan for **challenging situations**:

- ❖ What are the signs your child is becoming upset?
- ❖ What can help prevent the situation from escalating?
- ❖ Is there somewhere quiet you can go to take a break?

During the appointment

Use **visuals** to help your child understand what will be happening next. **Praise** your child, **encourage** positive behaviours or have a reward to motivate your child.

If your child does become distressed, **stay calm** yourself so you can support your child. If you are able, try to finish the appointment early and leave before the situation becomes too overwhelming.

While being prepared will give you the best chance to succeed, things don't always go to plan. Reflect on what worked and what didn't to help you plan for your next appointment.

If you would like more information about community inclusion, we have developed a series of factsheets and checklists for families and communities.

These can be found at:

<http://www.directory.byronearlyintervention.org.au/>



Shaping Outcomes

early childhood intervention service

> because we can