DENTAL VISITS

Establishing a dental home and receiving regular preventive care are key elements in maintaining a lifetime of healthy smiles. Here are some tips for establishing a dental home and having positive dental visits for a child with autism.

Finding a Dental Home

• It is important to find a dentist that has experience in caring for children with autism.
• Pediatric dentists receive specialized training in treating children with special health care needs.
• Ask to speak with the dentist. Share your concerns and special accommodations that may be needed.
• Describe any challenges that may present during the dental visit.
• Let the dentist know what time of day is best for your child.

Getting Ready for the Dental Visit

• Ask if the practice has any photographs of the office and dental staff available.
• Explain to your child who the people are and what they will do during the visit.
• Consider making a picture schedule with office photographs or line drawings.
• Read a social story about going to the dentist. Social stories will let your child know what will happen during the visit and how they should behave.
• Role play a visit to the dentist. Practice sitting in a reclining chair, opening and closing the mouth, counting the teeth and taking x-rays.
• Consider buying props at the drugstore such as a dental mouth mirror, small flashlight, and gloves to use during the role play. Your dentist may be able to give you some of the props.
• Visit the dental office before the dental appointment to help your child become familiar with the office staff and equipment. This may take several visits.
• Give verbal praise and reinforcement throughout the activities.

At the Dental Office

• Bring a favorite item or toy for your child to hold during the appointment.
• Sit with your child throughout the appointment.
• Communicate his or her comfort level and concerns to the dental team.
• Stay calm and talk with your child in a soothing voice.
• It may take more than one visit to complete the examination.
• Give verbal praise for each step of the visit.