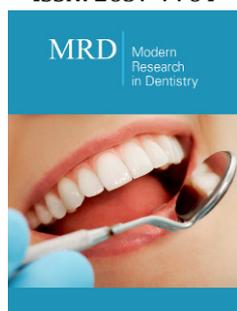


Uncomplicating Pediatric Dentistry

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Opinion

Children are not little adults. They differ physically, physiologically and emotionally, are more vulnerable to environmental changes. They are generally more fearful to potentially new and threatening conditions, and that is absolutely normal. As adults, it is our responsibility to provide children with a happy and healthy environment. This is precisely a responsibility for dentist as well. Dental caries is one of the most prevalent findings in children. With drastically evolving and exciting food and beverages choices, due to growing trends in international cuisines finding local acceptability worldwide, we find today that more children are finding dental care necessary. With this growing need and growing awareness of parents for dental care and hygiene in children, there is clearly an increasing need of more pediatric dentists. Interestingly, there are not enough pediatric dentists to cater to the surge in pediatric patients. Due to lack of dentists trained in pediatric dental procedures, general dentists are often faced with the challenge of treating children. In this era of specialized dental practice, more than aware parents, general dentists seem to avoid the idea of treating pediatric dental patients. Some claim that treating children is difficult, owing to their small teeth sizes and behavior issues. Others find it too much of an effort to convince multiple stakeholders, both the patient and the parents, of even the smallest of procedures.

Apart from the pre-treatment consensus, treating kids is indeed challenging, as primary teeth are more fragile considering thinner enamel and lesser surface area. More time is required to treat a child as compared to adults; this makes it sound less profitable. However, this is not true! Considering the complexity and precision required in trying to save the primary teeth or to work on the primary teeth to make sure that the permanent ones arrive beautifully and in perfect condition, pediatric dentistry is becoming equally rewarding professionally. This is also helped by the fact that parents these days understand the importance more and take much more care of their children's teeth than 10-15 years ago in most parts of the world. Further, treating a child successfully also helps build a good rapport with the family, which not only works wonders in spreading a good word but also in building a long-lasting relationship for dental needs through adolescence and possibly adulthood. Less on the jargon and more on the specifics, here are some basic rules to treat a child patient effectively and to carve a great pediatric dental practice:

Treat your patient as a king

Irrespective of who the patient is accompanied with it, it is you who have to make the child comfortable in a dental clinic. All the attention should be towards children so that they feel at ease with the surroundings. Let them decide what procedure to start with, for example, ask them which side we should start with, which tooth to clean first etc. By doing so you tend to give them a feeling of authority that inculcates a sense of involvement and control in the procedures done. They feel commander of the situation, which helps in alleviating fear and anxiety.

Have patience and be friendly

Patience and endurance are the key. This may sound like a cliché, but this is the most effective way of managing a child in a dental office. Being impatient with a child damages the dentist-patient relationship permanently. Treating children can sometimes be very

stressful and often a dentist's patience is put to test, but one must also understand the fact that children, unlike adults, take more time to grasp hold of surroundings in and can behave in an unexpected manner. Listen to what the patient says carefully first. One must repeat a particular instruction several times for a child to understand. Children are very inquisitive, and one must answer and satisfy all their queries. Once they are convinced, they themselves helps to complete the procedure in an efficient manner.

Help them see what you are saying

"Tell-show-do" is one of the oldest and the most effective behavior management technique followed by dentists worldwide. This helps making the procedure less scary for the child. Better is to modify this technique into "tell-show-feel-do". By making them touch and feel the things their apprehensions are relieved, such as letting them hold the suction tips, cottons rolls, mouth mirror etc. Use simpler languages and words that a child can easily comprehend. Get down to their psychological level and talk with them. Make them understand what you will be doing. Your conversation should be both verbal and visual.

Practice conservative not invasive

Intention is simple; just stay away from pain-causing procedures. Adhere to practice minimally invasive dentistry in case of children especially during initial visits to dental office. Use "no

drill, no fill" procedures such as Hall's technique and silver diamine fluoride for treatment of dental caries. If the patient comes with a complain of pain and requires intensive treatment that is where the pediatric dentist steps in!

Cultivate healthy relationships

While treating children the relation is always three pronged, as we have to communicate both with the parents and the child.

All dentists have their own unique ways of working, but there are a few things that are most essential and worth a re-emphasis. First is the necessity of understanding dental hygiene and care is necessary for parents. There still are many parents that feel that primary teeth do not require much care, and the natural course of getting permanent teeth, after primary teeth fall, is the best dental management. This is completely wrong! Such a thought process can result in poor natural teeth condition throughout the lifetime. Secondly, children need to overcome the fear of a dental chair. Not only it helps them shed all dental surgery related inhibitions early in life, but they learn the importance of dental care early in life and share knowledge in the society as they grow up. Thirdly, well, we all love strong and lovely teeth! Why not feel great about eating what we like, drinking what we love and experiencing mouthwatering delicacies available to us. Caries and sensitivities should not bother or scare us!

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