



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Top Tips for Going to the Dentist

Sensory Processing

Issued by the Paediatric Occupational Therapy Department

Visiting the dentist can be an overwhelming experience for some children and young adults, especially for those who struggle to process sensory information.

Children may squirm in the dentist chair due to the bright lights located above the chair, or dislike being in a reclined position for a prolonged period of time, or they may struggle to deal with loud dentistry tools.

Included below are several strategies that can be tried. Consider talking with your dentist before the appointment on how best to implement them.

Before the dental appointment:

- To reduce anxiety: at home, role-play going to dentist. Also, ask if you can visit the dental practice with your child before the appointment.
- Keep scheduled check-ups.
- Consider telling your child about the appointment as early as you can and discuss any worries they may have.
- Social stories can be helpful to explain what is going to happen at the appointment and why it is necessary.
- Try a facial massage, applying firm pressure around the mouth to help desensitise the area.
- Drinking thick fluids through a straw or eating a chewy snack on the way to the dentist can provide a calming and regulating input.
- Heavy work activities or wearing a backpack filled with toys or books whilst walking to dentist can help to calm and regulate.

- Also consider planning a lovely activity to do after the appointment.

During the dental appointment:

- Encourage your dentist to explain each step of the process.
- Allow your child to see tools the dentist may use if they are comfortable with this.
- Consider using a visual timer to indicate how long the dentist visit will take.
- If your child is sensitive to light, consider using protective sunglasses or a hat to reduce the intensity of the dentist light.
- Consider turning off any unnecessary lights to reduce the overall lighting level.
- If the dentist drill is required, let the drill run for 30 seconds outside the mouth to allow the child to get used to the noise.
- If your child is noise sensitive, try to reduce the overall noise level in the room, for example, turn off a radio. Also, consider using ear defenders or noise cancelling earbuds.
- Consider bringing fidget toys or a comfort toy to help with distraction.
- Consider using a weighted lap pad during the visit to provide a calming input.

Additional information

A sensory processing article to share with your dentist.

[Information for Dentists: Sensory Processing](#)

Social stories.

[An example of a social story: Suzie goes to the Dentist](#)

A Video resource around social stories have been developed by Sheffield's NHS Children's Sensory Processing Service.

[Making Sense: Social Stories](#)

Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS)

You may be able to claim a refund of some travel costs under this scheme. For more information visit the NHS website:

www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/healthcosts/pages/travelcosts.aspx

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, easy read, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.



the QR code to the left.

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Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

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PIN 1016/V1

Review date: June 2026

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