**Are We Ready for The Dentist?**

**9 Important Skills to Master to Make Dental Visits Easier**

It can be common for kids fear going to the dentist or find some part of the visit uncomfortable. Sometimes this can result in crying, tantrums, and behavior problems at the dentist. By gradually exposing your child (first at home, then at the dentist) to aspects of the dental visit they may fear, you can help them find their inner courage and have a better experience at the dentist. Working with a therapist who is trained in this type of *exposure therapy* can often be helpful.

**Skill #1: Calm voice and body while driving to dentist/sitting in waiting room for 15 min**

**Skill #2: Follows simple directions at the dentist**

**Skill #3: Lies back in a dental chair for 15 minutes**

**Skill #4: Tolerates looking at adult with mask on for 5 minutes**

**Skill #5: Tolerates light near/on face for 5 min**

**Skill #6: Opens mouth wide for 20 seconds when asked to**

**Skill #7: Allows gloved finger in mouth without closing for 15 seconds**

**Skill #8: Allows mouth mirror/dental probe in mouth for 15 seconds**

**Skill #9: Allows teeth to be cleaned during dental visit for 30 sec at a time**

Worried your child might struggle with one or more of the 9 skills? Don’t worry, you can practice them at home to build up to their confidence. Below, find example fear ladders you can help your child work through to gain confidence at the dentist. Print off the ones you need and work through them at your own pace. Your child may be able to skip some rungs on the ladder if they don’t have much fear for that topic. However, on some challenges, if your child has a particularly high level of anxiety, you have to go even slower that what is on the ladder. Use a token system (see separate handout) to help motivate your child to work on each skill.

**Fear Ladder**

Construct a ladder of places or situations that you avoid. At the top of the ladder put those which make you most anxious. At the bottom of the ladder put places or situations you avoid, but which don’t bother you as much. In the middle of the ladder put ones that are ‘in-between’. Give each item a rating from 0-10 according to how anxious you would feel if you had to be in that situation. Overcome your anxiety by approaching these situations, starting from the bottom of the ladder. Completing each bravery challenge should earn your child a “bravery buck” token for their token system. Items with an \* mean you’ll have to work with your dental office to complete.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **My Goal: Have a calm voice and body while driving to dentist and sitting in waiting room for 15 minutes** | |
| **0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10** | |
| **No fear Moderate Extreme** | |
| **Situation** | **Anxiety**  **(0-10)** |
| **\*Drive to dental office, play in waiting room 15 min, tour dental office, including seeing dental chair, instruments** |  |
| **Drive to dental office, play in waiting room 5 min** |  |
| **Drive to dental office, walk in the waiting room and say hi to the receptionist** |  |
| **Drive to dental office, park in the parking lot for 5 min, then leave** |  |
| **Drive by the dental office** |  |
| **Watch a YouTube video about what to expect at the dentist:** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQi2F9nhuU4**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQi2F9nhuU4) |  |
| **Look at pictures of the dental office online** |  |
| **Read a social story about going to the dentist and explain why it is important. Review visual schedule of steps of dental visit.** |  |

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **My Goal: Lay back in a dental chair for 15 minutes** | |
| **0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10** | |
| **No fear Moderate Extreme** | |
| **Situation** | **Anxiety**  **(0-10)** |
| **\*Lay in dentist chair 100% reclined for 15 min** |  |
| **\*Lay in dentist chair 100% reclined for 10 min** |  |
| **\*Lay in dentist chair 100% reclined for 5 min** |  |
| **\*Lay in dentist chair 100% reclined for 60 seconds** |  |
| **\*Lay in dentist chair 75% reclined for 30 seconds** |  |
| **\*Lay in dentist chair 50% reclined for 30 seconds** |  |
| **\*Lay in dentist chair 25% reclined for 30 seconds** |  |
| **\*Sit in dentist chair 0% reclined for 1 min.** |  |
| **Lay in a recliner chair 100% reclined for 15 minutes** |  |
| **Lay in a recliner chair 100% reclined for 10 minutes** |  |
| **Lay in a recliner chair 100% reclined for 5 minutes** |  |
| **Lay in a recliner chair 100% reclined for 1 minute** |  |
| **Lay in a recliner chair 75% reclined for 5 minutes** |  |
| **Lay in a recliner chair 75% reclined for 1 minute** |  |
| **Lay in a recliner chair 50% reclined for 5 minutes** |  |
| **Lay in a recliner chair 50% reclined for 1 minute** |  |
| **Lay in a recliner chair 25% reclined for 5 minutes** |  |
| **Lay in a recliner chair 25% reclined for 1 minute** |  |
| **Watch a YouTube video about what to expect at the dentist:** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQi2F9nhuU4**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQi2F9nhuU4) **Review a visual schedule of dental visit.** |  |
| **Read a social story about going to the dentist or look at pictures of a dental chair online and explain its purpose.** |  |
| **Sit in a recliner chair 0% reclined for 15 minutes** |  |
| **Sit in a recliner chair 0% reclined 10 minutes** |  |
| **Sit in a recliner chair 0% reclined for 5 minutes** |  |
| **Sit in a recliner chair 0% reclined for 3 minutes** |  |
| **Sit in a recliner chair 0% reclined for 60 seconds** |  |
| **Sit in a recliner chair 0% reclined for 30 seconds** |  |

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**Fear Ladder**

Construct a ladder of places or situations that you avoid. At the top of the ladder put those which make you most anxious. At the bottom of the ladder put places or situations you avoid, but which don’t bother you as much. In the middle of the ladder put ones that are ‘in-between’. Give each item a rating from 0-10 according to how anxious you would feel if you had to be in that situation. Overcome your anxiety by approaching these situations, starting from the bottom of the ladder. Completing each bravery challenge should earn your child a “bravery buck” token for their token system. Items with an \* mean you’ll have to work with your dental office to complete.

|  |  |
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| **My Goal: Be able to look at dental staff with mask on for 5 minutes** | |
| **0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10** | |
| **No fear Moderate Extreme** | |
| **Situation** | **Anxiety**  **(0-10)** |
| **\*Watch dental professional put on/wear mask for 5 minutes.** |  |
| **\*Watch dental professional put on/wear mask for 30 seconds** |  |
| **Watch caregiver put on/wear mask for 30 minutes.** |  |
| **Watch caregiver put on/wear mask for 20 minutes.** |  |
| **Watch caregiver put on/wear mask for 10 minutes.** |  |
| **Watch caregiver put on/wear mask for 5 minutes.** |  |
| **Watch caregiver put on/wear mask for 2 minutes.** |  |
| **Watch caregiver put on/wear mask for 60 seconds.** |  |
| **Watch caregiver put on/wear mask for 30 seconds.** |  |
| **Watch caregiver put on/wear mask for 10 seconds.** |  |
| **Hold mask in hands for 30 seconds.** |  |
| **Hold mask in hands for 10 seconds.** |  |
| **Watch a YouTube video about what to expect at the dentist:** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQi2F9nhuU4**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQi2F9nhuU4) |  |
| **Look at pictures of dental staff wearing masks online** |  |
| **Read a social story about going to the dentist and explain why dental staff wear masks.** |  |

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **My Goal: Tolerates light near/on face for 5 minutes** | |
| **0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10** | |
| **No fear Moderate Extreme** | |
| **Situation** | **Anxiety**  **(0-10)** |
| **\*Light near face at dental visit. Work up to 5 min.** |  |
| **Looks up at regular light in ceiling, 60 seconds** |  |
| **Low intensity flashlight beam (flashlight with thin napkin covering), near face, 60 secs. Work up to 3 min.** |  |
| **Low intensity flashlight beam (flashlight with thin napkin covering), progressively closer to face, 20 secs** |  |
| **Shine a low intensity flashlight beam on belly, away from face (flashlight with thin napkin covering), 20 secs** |  |
| **Watch a YouTube video about what to expect at the dentist:** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQi2F9nhuU4**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQi2F9nhuU4) |  |
| **Look at pictures of dental staff shining a light in a child’s mouth** |  |
| **Read a social story about going to the dentist and explain why dental staff need to use a light to see inside the mouth.** |  |

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **My Goal: Opens mouth wide for 20 seconds when asked to** | |
| **0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10** | |
| **No fear Moderate Extreme** | |
| **Situation** | **Anxiety**  **(0-10)** |
| **\*Opens mouth wide for 20 seconds when asked to at dentist** |  |
| **Opens mouth wide for 20 seconds when prompted** |  |
| **Opens mouth wide for 10 seconds when prompted** |  |
| **Opens mouth wide for 5 seconds when prompted** |  |
| **Opens mouth wide for 1 second when prompted** |  |
| **Watch a YouTube video about what to expect at the dentist:** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQi2F9nhuU4**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQi2F9nhuU4) |  |
| **Look at pictures of dental staff looking in child’s open mouth. Child watches caregiver open mouth wide.** |  |
| **Read a social story about going to the dentist and explain why it is important to open mouth and keep it open.** |  |

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **My Goal: Allows gloved finger in mouth without closing for 15 seconds** | |
| **0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10** | |
| **No fear Moderate Extreme** | |
| **Situation** | **Anxiety**  **(0-10)** |
| **\*Hygienist GLOVED finger in mouth 15 seconds** |  |
| **\*Hygienist GLOVED finger in mouth 5 seconds** |  |
| **Caregiver GLOVED finger touching child’s teeth/mouth for 20 seconds.** |  |
| **Caregiver GLOVED finger touching child’s teeth/mouth for 10 seconds.** |  |
| **Caregiver GLOVED finger touching child’s teeth/mouth for 5 seconds.** |  |
| **Caregiver GLOVED finger touching child’s teeth/mouth for 2 seconds. Then, additional practice working up to 15 seconds.** |  |
| **Caregiver GLOVED finger touching lips for 5 seconds.** |  |
| **Caregiver GLOVED finger touching lips for 2 seconds.** |  |
| **Child holds gloves in their hand.** |  |
| **Caregiver finger touching child’s lips for 5 seconds** |  |
| **Own finger touching teeth for 5 seconds. Then, additional practice to work up to 15 seconds.** |  |
| **Own finger touching lips for 5 seconds. Then, additional practice as needed to work up to 15 seconds.** |  |
| **Watch a YouTube video about what to expect at the dentist:** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQi2F9nhuU4**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQi2F9nhuU4) |  |
| **Look at pictures of dental staff wearing gloves and touching child’s mouth** |  |
| **Read a social story about going to the dentist and explain why dental staff need to wear gloves and touch inside mouth.** |  |

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **My Goal: Allows mouth mirror/dental probe in mouth for 10 seconds** | |
| **0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10** | |
| **No fear Moderate Extreme** | |
| **Situation** | **Anxiety**  **(0-10)** |
| **\*Hygienist uses mouth mirror/dental probe during dental visit for 10 secs at a time.** |  |
| **\*Hygienist uses mouth mirror/dental probe during dental visit for 2 seconds. 10 secs at a time.** |  |
| **Use spoon to gently touch/scratch teeth for 10 seconds** |  |
| **Use spoon to gently touch/scratch teeth for 5 seconds** |  |
| **Use spoon to gently touch/scratch teeth for 1 second** |  |
| **Watch a YouTube video about what to expect at the dentist:** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQi2F9nhuU4**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQi2F9nhuU4) |  |
| **Look at pictures of dental staff inspecting child’s mouth with mirror/probe.** |  |
| **Read a social story about going to the dentist and explain why dental staff need look in mouth with mirror and use dental probe to check teeth.** |  |

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **My Goal: Allows teeth to be cleaned during dental visit for 30 sec at a time** | |
| **0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10** | |
| **No fear Moderate Extreme** | |
| **Situation** | **Anxiety**  **(0-10)** |
| **\*Hygienist cleans teeth during dental visit at 30 second intervals** |  |
| **Electric toothbrush in mouth turned on, brushing teeth on lowest/gentlest setting, for 60 seconds** |  |
| **Electric toothbrush in mouth turned on, brushing teeth on lowest/gentlest setting, for 30 seconds** |  |
| **Electric toothbrush in mouth turned on, brushing teeth on lowest/gentlest setting, for 10 seconds** |  |
| **Electric toothbrush in mouth turned on, brushing teeth on lowest/gentlest setting, for 5 seconds** |  |
| **Electric toothbrush in mouth turned on, brushing teeth on lowest/gentlest setting, for 2 seconds** |  |
| **Electric toothbrush in mouth turned off, brushing teeth manually, for 30 seconds** |  |
| **Electric toothbrush in mouth turned off, brushing teeth manually, for 20 seconds** |  |
| **Electric toothbrush in mouth turned off, brushing teeth manually, for 10 seconds** |  |
| **Place electric toothbrush in mouth turned off, for 10 seconds** |  |
| **Hold electric toothbrush while on for 20 seconds** |  |
| **Hold electric toothbrush while off for 20 seconds** |  |
| **Watch a YouTube video about what to expect at the dentist:** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQi2F9nhuU4**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQi2F9nhuU4) |  |
| **Look at pictures of dental staff cleaning a child’s teeth** |  |
| **Read a social story about brushing teeth and going to the dentist and explain why it is important** |  |

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**Bravery Challenge Log**

Every time you do an exposure exercise (bravery challenge), record it here:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | **ANXIETY RANKING (0-100)** | | |
| **DATE** | **CHALLENGE** | **START** | **HIGHEST DURING** | **END** |
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