Going To The Dentist

Social Story



I am going to the dentist to help keep my teeth healthy and strong. I can ask questions, and the dental team will listen to me. I can bring something that helps me feel calm, and a supportive adult will stay with me.



I will check in at the front desk when I arrive.
I may need to wait, and I can be patient.
The waiting room may be busy, noisy,
bright, or crowded, and that is okay.
I can bring things that help me feel calm,
like headphones, a fidget, a puzzle,
my phone, or a comfort item.

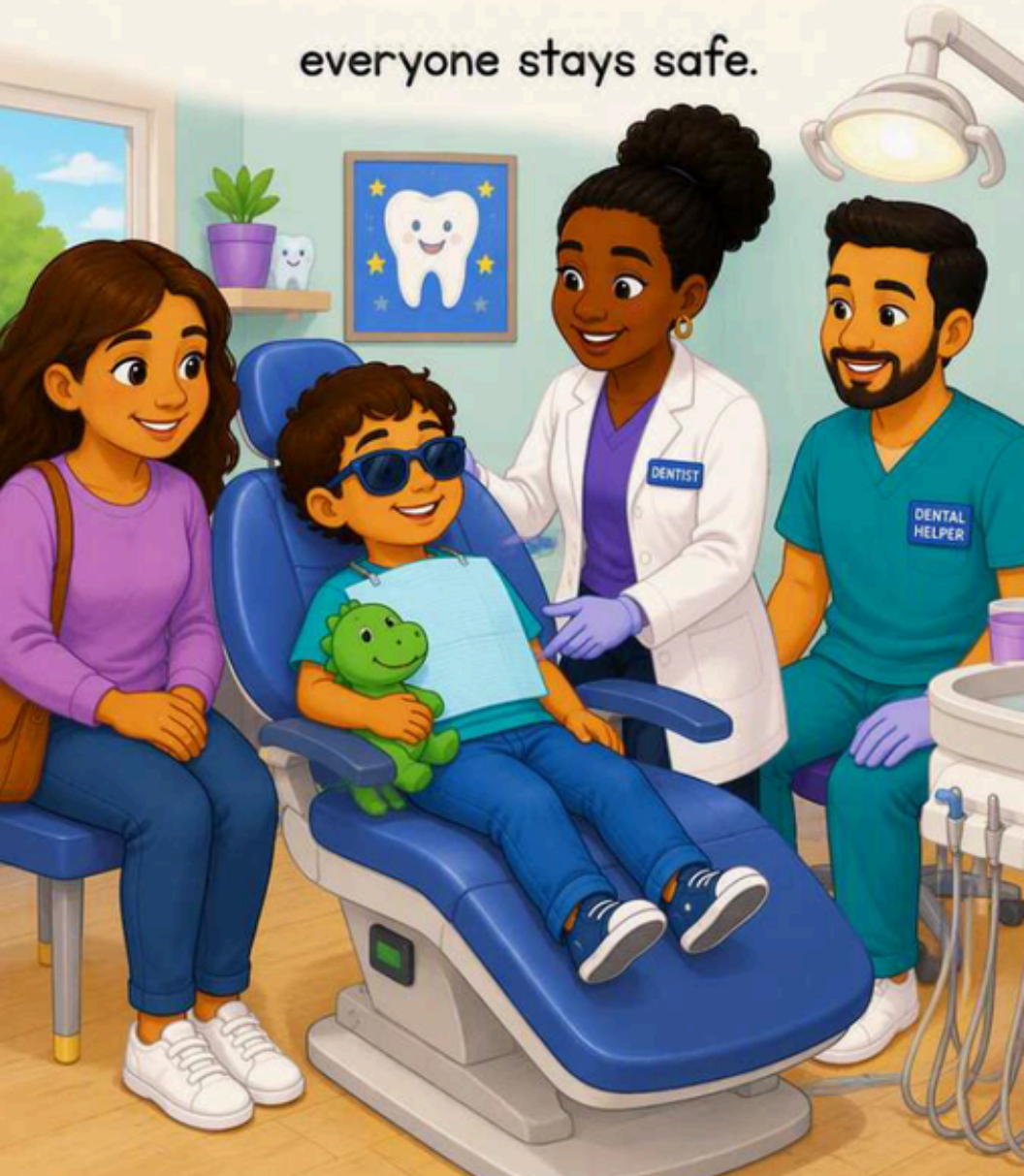


The dentist and dental team will greet me and help me feel comfortable. They are kind, and I can ask questions at any time.

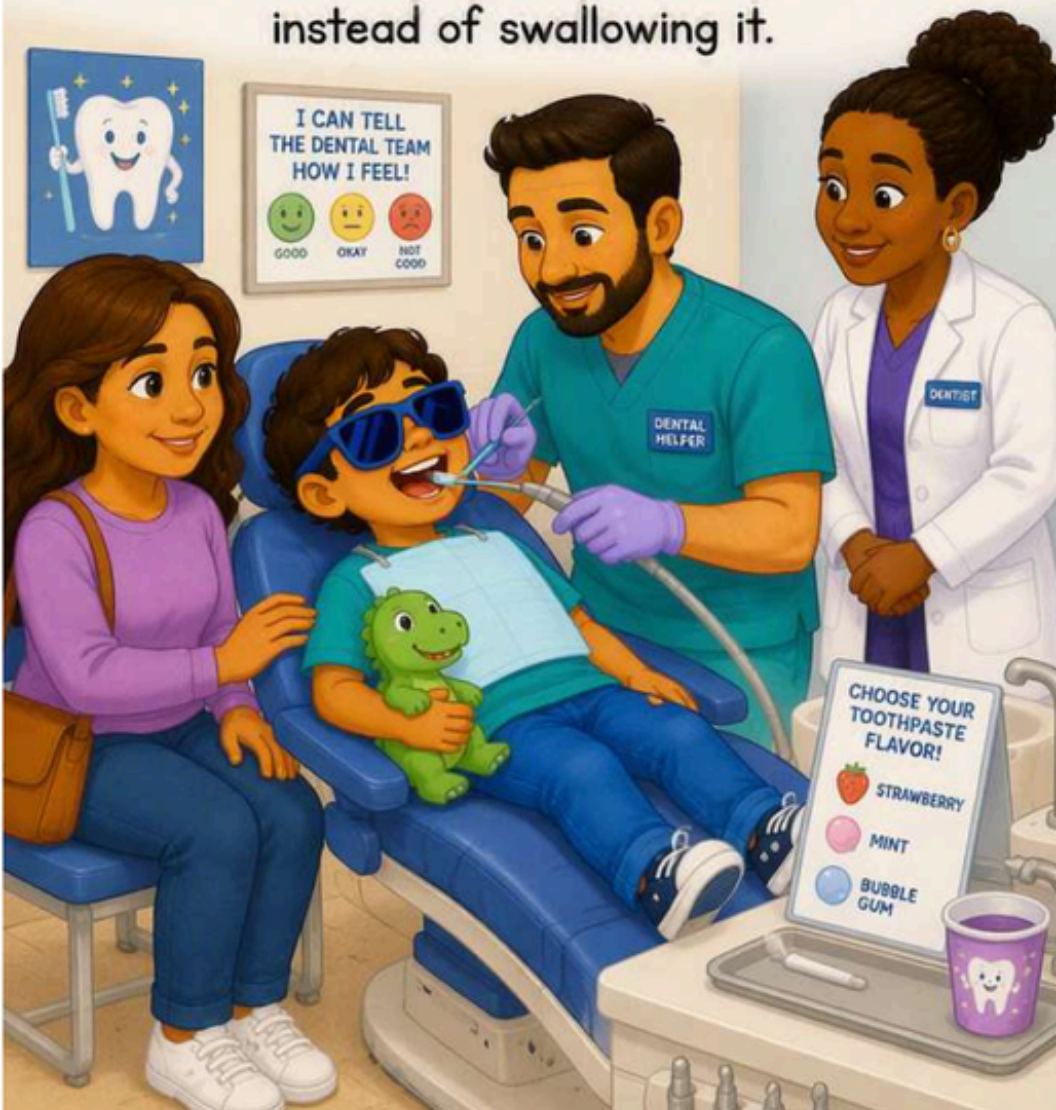
I can say hello, wave, or smile in the way that feels best for me.



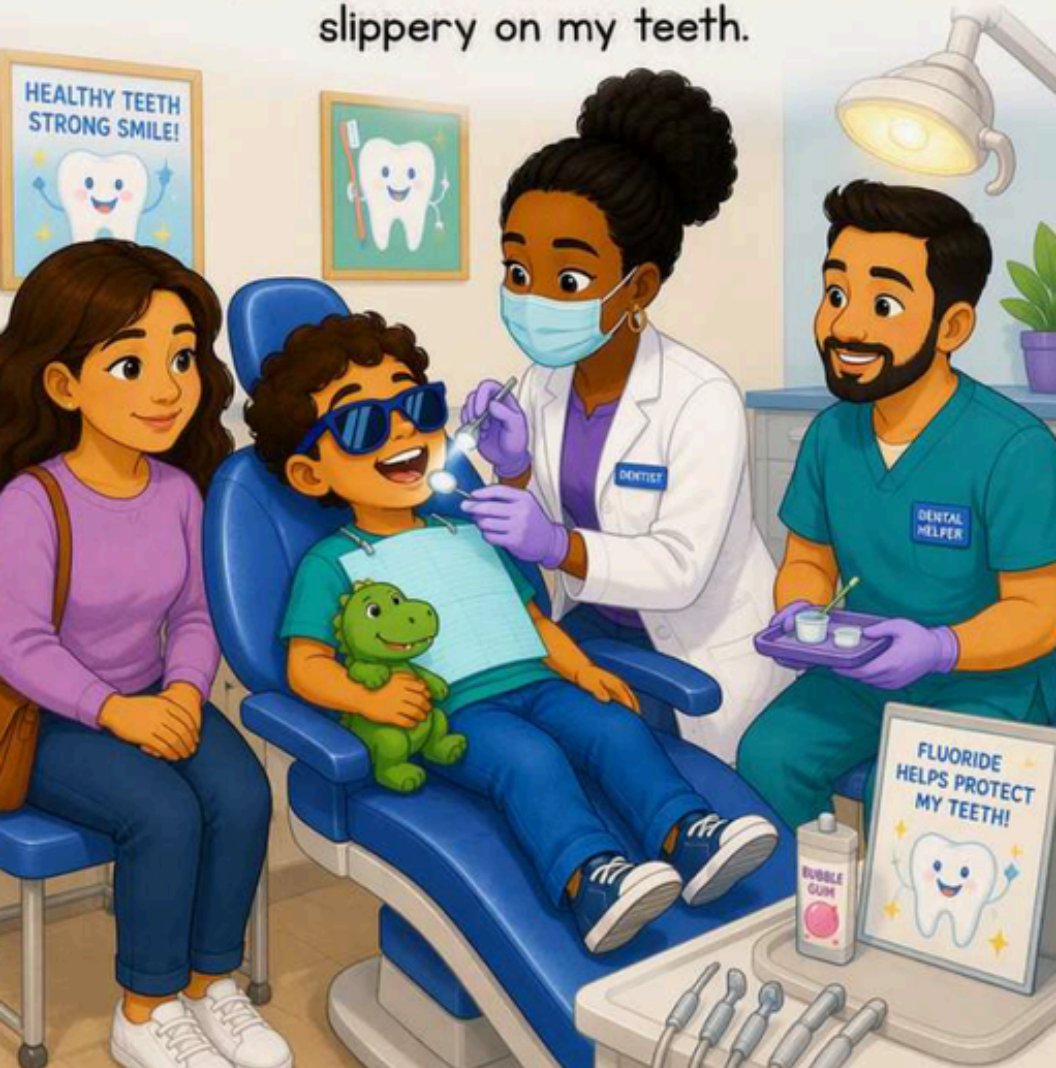
When I am ready, I will sit in a special dental chair that may move during my visit. I can wear a paper bib, use sunglasses, and ask to bring a comfort item. I will try to keep my body still so everyone stays safe.



A dental helper may clean my teeth with a special toothbrush and floss. I might feel vibrations, hear sounds, or feel water, and I can open my mouth wide to help. I can tell the dental team how I feel at any time, and I may get to choose a toothpaste flavor, but I will spit it out instead of swallowing it.



The dentist will look at my teeth using a small mirror, a light, and other special tools.
I might feel air or water on my teeth, and I can open my mouth wide to help.
I can ask questions at any time.
The dentist may brush a special vitamin called fluoride on my teeth to help keep them strong and healthy.
It might taste different and feel a little slippery on my teeth.



My dental visit is all done.
I can be proud of myself for trying my best.
If I was not ready to do everything today,
that is okay.
I can come back another day,
and the dental team will help me
when I am ready.



Tips for Caregivers and Providers

Preparation

- Read the social story before the appointment and again on the day of the visit.
- Pair the story with real photos of the dental office when possible and watch videos to increase familiarity.
- Practice key steps such as opening wide, sitting still, and raising a hand to request a break.
- Brush teeth before the appointment if possible.
- Ask if the dental provider offers practice visits.
- Another option is bringing your child to observe during your own dental appointment.

Comfort & Sensory Supports

- Bring comfort items such as:
  - Headphones
  - Fidgets
  - Stuffed animals
  - Cozy blankets
  - Weighted blankets or vests
  - Other preferred calming items
- Keep language consistent and repeat familiar phrases.
- If gagging is a concern, let the dental team know ahead of time.
- Some individuals find it helpful to focus on slow breathing through their nose or gently pull their knees toward their chest to help reduce gagging, if recommended by the dental team.
- Ask about a "tell-show-do" approach, where the dental team explains and demonstrates a step before completing it.

Communication & Self-Advocacy

- Create a simple break plan before the appointment. Decide how your child will communicate that they need a break.
- Encourage participation in healthcare decisions whenever possible.
- Offer choices whenever possible.
- Help children practice asking questions and sharing preferences.
- Share communication supports that work well at home, school, or therapy.

Tips for Caregivers and Providers

Supported Decision-Making & Consent

- Discuss safe touches and consent before the visit.
- Help children understand what types of touch may occur during the appointment and why.
- Encourage children to communicate when they feel uncomfortable, need a break, or have questions.
- Support children in learning to participate in decisions about their healthcare as they grow.

Strengths-Based Supports

- Share your child's interests, motivators, strengths, and successful support strategies with the dental team.
- Let the dental team know about favorite toys, characters, activities, rewards, topics, or special interests.
- These interests can help build rapport and increase comfort during the visit.

Flexibility

- Not all appointment steps need to be completed in one visit.
- It is okay to stop, take a break, and return another day if needed.
- Success looks different for every child. Celebrate effort, participation, and progress.

Resources

- **Oral Health Kansas**
  www.oralhealthkansas.org [oralhealthkansas.org], [Oral Health...Kansas Inc]
- **Children with Disabilities Resources (Oral Health Kansas)**
  www.oralhealthkansas.org/ChildrenDisabilities.html [oralhealthkansas.org]
- **Pathways to Oral Health**
  www.pathwaystooralhealth.org [pathwaysto...health.org]
- **Kansas Bureau of Oral Health (KDHE)**
  www.kdhe.ks.gov/619/Oral-Health [kdhe.ks.gov], [kdhe.ks.gov]
- **Kansas Dental Association**
  www.ksdental.org [kdhe.ks.gov]
- **Donated Dental Services (Dental Lifeline Network Kansas)**
  dentallifeline.org/Kansas [ksdental.org]

PATHWAYS TO ORAL HEALTH