

# Finding the Right Dental Home

## FOR YOUR CHILD OR YOUTH WITH SPECIAL NEEDS



Dental care is important because problems in the mouth can affect the health of the body. Children and youth with special health care or developmental needs should generally follow the same standards of care for children of all abilities. However, additional support may be needed. It is important to talk to your dentist about any physical or medical conditions, medications, allergies, and/or behavioral needs that may require some accommodations for your child. This checklist may help families have an ongoing positive relationship and experience with the dental care team for a life-long practice of healthy smiles!

**Instructions: Check the box if the dental office provides the service that supports your child or youth.**

THIS IS IMPORTANT		WHY?	
	Yes	No	
1. Does the dental office accept your insurance and have flexibility in payment plans if needed?			Payment options allow parent/caregiver to plan and budget for dental care either prior to or after the visit.
2. Does the dental office need any health history paperwork before the first visit?			It may take time to get medical records or complete forms.
3. Does the dental office offer scheduling flexibility to become familiar with the setting and staff?			This allows the family to see the office, meet the dental team and ask questions prior to the actual exam.
4. Does the dental office offer scheduling flexibility to support your child/youth's schedule and routine?			Children/youth who experience frequent medical needs, sensory or anxiety issues, or a range of appointments/therapies may need special scheduling considerations.
5. Is the dental office accessible to your child/youth in a wheelchair or with other mobility equipment (if needed)?			The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires dental offices to serve children, youth and adults with special health care needs and make accommodations for those using wheelchairs, walkers or any other mobility equipment.
6. Is the dental office able to provide communication support like Sign Language interpreters with enough notice before a visit?			The parent/caregiver needs to notify dental office about special communication needs like American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters or assistive technology, well in advance of visit.
7. Are you allowed to remain with your child/youth in the exam room?			The parent/caregiver's presence may reduce the child/youth's anxiety and increase their comfort with the dental care.
8. Does the dental office have a private exam room available?			A private exam room may prevent distractions or overstimulation of a child/youth with sensory challenges, anxiety, etc.

THIS IS IMPORTANT		WHY?	
	Yes	No	
9. Does the dental office allow your child/youth to bring a comforting object (toy, blanket) into exam or treatment room?			Allowing a child to bring a comfort item can reduce anxiety and increase trust and cooperation.
10. Does the exam room comfortably and physically accommodate your child/youth with mobility equipment (if needed)?			If a wheelchair fits parallel to the dental chair, a child/youth may be able to transfer into the dental chair for the exam. A dental chair with movable armrests may allow an easier transfer for a child/youth.
11. Does the dental office allow for using the same exam room and dental team during your child/youth's visits?			Consistency and routine may lessen anxiety and allow the child/youth and parent/caregiver to build positive relationships with familiar dental care team members.
12. Does the dental team allow your child/youth time to adjust to the exam room and get ready for the dental exam?			Allowing additional time for a child/youth to adjust to the exam room and dental team builds trust and comfort level.
13. Does the dental team talk with you about any special ways to interact with your child/youth?			Dental team asks the parent/caregiver ahead of time about any concerns or strategies to help the child/youth have the best dental experience possible. Dental care team can also suggest strategies such as the TELL, SHOW, DO approach: tell child what they are about to do, show child what the instrument may do, then do the procedure.
14. Does the dental team discuss behavioral support options if your child/youth has trouble remaining still?			Examples may include other seating options, music, noise cancelling headphones, sunglasses, or TV. Options including sedation, anesthesia or restraints require advance informed consent by parent/caregiver.
15. Does the dental team encourage your child/youth and family to ask questions?			The dental team encourages questions before and after the visit.
16. Are special dental care instructions written in an easy to understand format?			Special care instructions are written, easy to understand and in a family's first language.
17. Does the dental office have coverage for emergencies after hours or on weekends?			The parent/caregiver needs to know when and where to go for dental injuries or emergencies that occur outside of normal office hours.

**Checklist developed by Children and Youth Branch, Women's and Children's Health Section**

For more information on resources to support children with special health care needs, please call or email the **Children with Special Needs Helpline** at 1-800-737-3028 or [CYSHCN.Helpline@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:CYSHCN.Helpline@dhhs.nc.gov)

Adapted from:

- Dental Office Consideration Checklist. An Oral Health Professional's Guide to Serving Young Children with Special Health Care Needs <https://www.mchoralhealth.org/SpecialCare/pdf/M2-DentalOfficeConsiderations.pdf>
- Family Satisfaction Questionnaire. An Oral Health Professional's Guide to Serving Young Children with Special Health Care Needs <https://www.mchoralhealth.org/SpecialCare/pdf/M2-FamilySatisfactionQuestionnaire.pdf>
- "Oral Health Care for Children with Special Health Care Needs: A Guide for Family Members/Caregivers and Dental Providers," Oklahoma Dental Foundation, November 2013
- "Dental Practices: An Abbreviated Accessibility Survey" NC Office on Disability and Health

