

Understanding Your Child's Developing Smile

PRESCHOOL (Age 4-5)

By the time children reach preschool, they should have had their initial visit to a dental office. It is important for children to see a dentist every six months for a cleaning and examination. This helps maintain oral health and establish a healthy routine. Most four-five year olds have 20 teeth in their mouth. If they have discomfort when teeth are coming through, treating the area topically with Orajel or giving them children's Tylenol often alleviates the discomfort. Parents or guardians should be helping children brush their teeth in the morning and at night with a fluoride toothpaste. Flossing at this age is also beneficial in preventing tooth decay and developing good habits.

KINDERGARTEN (Age 5-6)

Most five-six year olds have 20 visible teeth, however, many adult (permanent) teeth are developing in the jaw bones. Around the age of six, another group of teeth will start to become visible- "six-year molars". It is also around this age when children begin to lose their front "baby" teeth and the permanent adult teeth begin to push through. As teeth become loose, the child should be instructed to wiggle the tooth back and forth and gently twist. As the permanent tooth moves into place, the baby tooth's connection to the gum tissue decreases and gentle wiggling can help it come out. At this age, an adult should still be helping with the morning and evening tooth brushing process. When the child is ready, having the parent brush the child's teeth first, then having the child brush, will help teach them about the process. Flossing daily is also beneficial in preventing tooth decay. Children should be going to the dentist every six months to maintain oral health and establish a routine of going to the dentist.

FIRST GRADE (Age 6-7)

This is the fun stage when many school pictures reflect a toothless smile! Many children have lost several teeth by this age. Continuing to encourage children to wiggle loose teeth, will be helpful during this transition to their adult smile. By now, most will have gained an additional set of permanent molars: "Six-Year Molars". With adult supervision, children at this age should be able to brush their own teeth and start to practice flossing. Parents or guardians should also consider a daily fluoride rinse (like ACT Kids, Colgate Kids, etc.) at night to help strengthen teeth. Children should be going to the dentist every six months for a routine exam and cleaning. Those who need to have dental work completed may benefit with the use of nitrous oxide "laughing gas" or child sedation medication (see Dental Anxiety paragraph on reverse) which is both safe and effective for this age group.

SECOND - SIXTH GRADES (Age 8-12)

This age group is typically transitioning to their "adult smile". Permanent teeth will continue to replace baby teeth and additional new teeth will come in behind the "six-year molars". As these adult back-teeth come through the gum tissue, parents or guardians should consider having dental sealants placed. Sealants act as a shield for the tooth and are placed into the deep grooves of the tooth's chewing surfaces. Sealants are a preventative measure for children who tend to be more prone to tooth decay. They are often covered by dental insurance and very successful in preventing cavities. Using a daily fluoride rinse (like ACT, Colgate Kids, etc.) at night will also help strengthen teeth. This age group should be able to effectively brush their teeth twice a day for two minutes. Many inexpensive electric toothbrushes offer a pre-programmed timer to help coach kids to spend the time needed for proper cleaning. Those who need to have dental work completed may benefit with the use of nitrous oxide "laughing gas" or child sedation medication (see Dental Anxiety paragraph on reverse) which is both safe and effective for this age group.