

## A Toddler Playdate with Your Dentist

For better or worse, our kids have been to the dentist most every day of their lives. From the moment they hit light, we have been examining the growth and development of their teeth, airways, jaws, and facial bones. You can look at this as their blessing or their curse. Only time will tell.

Most infants and toddlers are not seen by their dentist each and every day. Actually, quite a few kids start getting permanent teeth before they've ever had a thorough dental examination. A common misconception is that "baby" or primary teeth are not that important, since they will be lost anyway. As a result, there are a lot of kids whose first dental experience is an accident or a toothache. These emergency visits can be stressful for all involved, parents and dentists included.

Primary teeth are crucial to proper facial and social development. Those tiny little teeth are what your child uses to learn to eat, speak, and smile with. They also help the bones and muscles of the jaws and airways to develop correctly. Finally, baby teeth hold space in the jaws to allow for permanent teeth to arrive in an orderly fashion.

A child's first visit to the dentist should be at one year of age or the time the first tooth pokes through the gums, whichever comes first. These exams are a bit different than adult dental visits. As with adults, a full check-up of the teeth, airways, gums, jaws, head, and neck is performed. Most toddlers are very cooperative with the airway exam, as they usually are screaming at the top of their lungs. This is normal and to be expected at most any doctor visit from young children.

Radiographs are occasionally taken, but most often the dental exam is visual. Your child's teeth will be cleaned and a special fluoride varnish is applied. This varnish helps to strengthen the teeth and prevent cavities. It actually sticks to their teeth for a few days before being brushed off. This allows the varnish to do its job. Often, your dentist or hygienist will help to guide you in making healthy decisions for your baby when it comes to home care, diet, and oral hygiene. One of the main goals of these visits is to help mom, dad, and child build good dental experiences. These initial visits to the "treasure chest" and rides up and down in the dental chair help to make future visits less intimidating.

Until next week, keep smiling.

-Please send Drs. Parrish comments through [www.ParrishDental.com](http://www.ParrishDental.com).