

Dental Visits Part 1: Planning

The first step in scheduling a dental visit is finding a dental office that serves individuals with disabilities. Dental teams and dental clinics vary in how they can serve patients with disabilities and patients with Medicaid.



Get-To-Know-You Visits (Desensitization Visits)

Get-to-know-you visits give the person you support a chance to prepare for their upcoming dental care. Knowing the schedule, dental procedures and potential challenges ahead of time can make a more successful appointment. Some individuals may need multiple get-to-know-you visits to prepare for a dental appointment.

Get-to-know-you visits can include:

- Meeting the dental team and office staff.
- Touring the building and exam room.
- Learning about dental procedures and equipment.
- Discussing accommodations and behavior support options.



Before scheduling a get-to-know-you visit, you should ask if there is a fee and if you can visit at non-busy times, like early morning or lunchtime.

If a get-to-know-you visit is not possible, another option is looking at photos of the office and staff members on the dental office's website. Some dental offices may even have video tours online.

Accommodations

Dental offices that serve individuals with disabilities may provide accommodations. The dental team can help determine which accommodation(s) is best for the person you support. **Before the appointment, request that all accommodations be documented in the patient chart.** Ask if the staff can review the chart before the patient arrives to prevent disruptions to the treatment plan. If the person you support needs oral health education, request this ahead of time to prepare the oral team.



Wheelchair Accessibility

Accessible parking spaces, sidewalks, ramps and entrances.

Accessible waiting rooms and restrooms with wide pathways and doorways.

Accessible exam rooms with adjustable dental chairs, ability to transfer patients into dental chairs or ability to treat patients in their wheelchairs

Examples of accommodations include:

- Low-stimulation exam rooms.
 - Calming music.
 - Dimmed lighting.
 - Private exam space.
- Weighted blankets.
- Tinted glasses.
- Headphones.
- Televisions in exam rooms.
- Get-to-know-you (desensitization) visits.
- Protective stabilization.
- Early or specially scheduled appointments to:
 - Avoid long wait times.
 - Avoid crowded waiting rooms.



Dental Specialties

If the person you support needs further care, they may be referred to a dental specialist.



Periodontists	Diagnose, prevent and treat gum diseases.
Prosthodontists	Treat dental and facial problems related to missing teeth.
Pediatric Dentists	Provide primary and comprehensive dental care for infants and children.
Oral Surgeons	Provide surgical treatment for dental diseases and injuries.
Endodontists	Diagnose, treat and prevent infections and injuries to the pulp and nerves of teeth.
Orthodontists	Diagnose, prevent and correct poor bites.

For residents of Indiana, Michigan, or Ohio visit www.SmileHelpNow.com to find a dentist that accepts Medicaid or provides services at low-cost.

Dental Visits Part 2: Behavior Guidance, Protective Stabilization & Sedation

As a caregiver, you will want to know all the options a dental office can offer the person you support. You and the dental team are responsible for creating a plan that balances quality dental treatment and the well-being of the person you support.

Before recommending supports, dentists will consider the following:

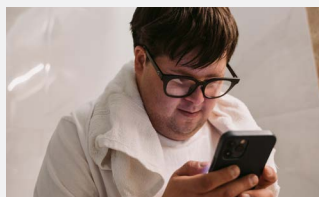
- Behavior guidance that has been successful at home or during previous dental visits.
- Oral health needs of the patient.
- Emotional and cognitive level of the patient.
- Medical and physical condition of the patient.
- Preferences of the patient.
- Preferences of the legal guardian.
- The safety and well-being of the patient during the procedure.



Behavior Guidance

The least invasive support the dental team can give a patient is behavior guidance such as distraction or desensitization.

- **Distraction:** When a patient can have a tablet, phone, headphones, a fidget toy or a special item as a distraction, their attention is not on the dental treatment.
- **Desensitization:** Carefully getting a patient used to dental treatment can have long-term benefits in helping patients tolerate dental visits and dental care in the future.



Protective Stabilization

Protective stabilization is used to limit a patient's ability to move during a procedure. It may be a better option for some because of the health risks and costs that come with sedation. Each patient will respond to protective stabilization differently. Some patients can tolerate or even find comfort in protective stabilization. For other patients, protective stabilization can cause distress.

The dental team should talk to a patient and the caregiver about protective stabilization before using it. Legal guardians will need to give signed consent before the appointment. If you have questions, you can ask at the [get-to-know-you visit](#).

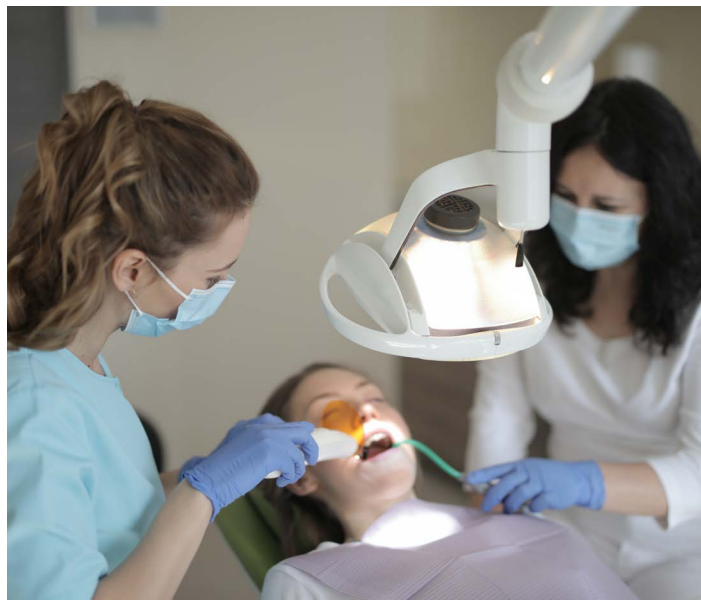


Sedation

Dentists can offer a range of sedation options to patients, from local anesthesia to general anesthesia, and some may require going to a hospital operating room. The deeper the level of sedation, the greater the potential health risks for the patient.

Dentists will evaluate a patient's health and medical history to determine the safest level of sedation for each dental treatment. If a patient has significant health concerns, the dentist also needs to consult the primary care doctor before using sedation.

Sedation can seem more convenient in some situations. However, **sedation has health risks, such as respiratory distress or heart rate and blood pressure changes.** This is also an expensive option and is not always covered by insurance.



More You Should Know

Before using sedation or protective stabilization with a patient, a dentist will inform the caregiver and patient of each option's benefits and risks. **If a patient is going to be sedated, a legal guardian needs to provide signed consent before the dental appointment.**

Caregivers for adults with disabilities are advocates for the person they support. **If you feel that the dental team is recommending an option that is too invasive, you can request more information.** You can also explain to the dental team what option you think is best for the person you support.

Here are some things you can say or ask in that situation:

- “At home, _____ works well when I need to check his mouth. Can we try that?”
- “At the last dental visit, we did _____. This is why it did/didn't work.”
- “Can you tell me more about why you recommend this option? What are the benefits and risks?”
- “Before we use sedation, can we talk about the possibility of protective stabilization?”



Motivational Interviewing: Dental Visits

Better Conversations, Better Oral Health

Use these motivational interviewing (MI) strategies to talk about oral health with the person you support.



MI Strategy for the Person You Support

Use summarizing to learn about changes the person you support wants to make.

Example:

“Here’s what I’m hearing. You didn’t like how bright it was in the room. And the dentist’s sunglasses hurt your ears. Now we need a better plan for next time. Did I miss anything?”



MI Strategy for Guardian or Family Member

Use affirmations to acknowledge the person’s emotions.

Example:

“Sounds like you’ve had some tough experiences taking [person you support] to the dentist. No wonder you’re worried about this appointment.”



Adapting MI Strategies

Remember to use summaries when you transition from talking to action planning.

Next Steps

These are additional resources that will help you and the person you support keep thinking about this topic after your conversation is over:

- [Dental Visit Checklist Handout](#)
- [Dental Visits Video](#)

