

# Parental Presence During Their Child's Dental Treatment

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## ABSTRACT

*Parents can play an important role as team members of the oral health care delivery team of their children. The pros and cons of the presence of parents during dental treatment are discussed. This article also describes various factors to be considered during decision making process to either include or exclude the parent during dental treatment of their child to achieve the ultimate goal of providing safe and quality dental treatment.*

## KEYWORDS

*Parent, Presence, Dental, Treatment*

Parents play a unique role in dental care and over all well being of the child. Some parents and dental practitioners prefer the presence of a parent with their child during the delivery of in-office dental care. Parents are aware of their child's previous dental experiences and are also aware of the child's interest

and fears. Many parents prefer to stay with their child during the painful dental experience. It has also been reported that many children ask their parents to accompany them during the dental office visit (1). However, some parents are very anxious of the delivery of dental treatment on their child. Such parents are afraid of

entering the operatory and participating in effective treatment delivery and being a part of communication between the dentist and their child. Such parents voluntarily decide to not being present during their child's dental treatment.

Parental presence or absence during dental procedure is one of the methods described in the guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry for behavior modification (2). The guideline recommends a judicial decision making on part of the practitioner to benefit from either parental presence or absence to achieve cooperation of the child. The dentist should evaluate the pros and cons of presence of the parent, and this decision should be based on individual child and the parental involvement of that particular child. This decision to either allow the parent to participate during treatment should be based on the behavior of the child, the past experiences of the child and the operator, feedback from the parent, and the comfort level of the operator.

The ultimate goal of parental presence or absence is to minimize the child's anxiety towards dental treatment and achieve a positive dental experience. It is also aimed to prevent negative behavior and establish effective communication between the child and the dentist. If the parent is present during the treatment, he/she is expected to be an active facilitator and a strong link of this communication.

There are different views among dentists on the benefit of parental presence during dental treatment of their child (3,4). Parental presence can be helpful in case of very young and or extremely anxious patients.

Those in favor of allowing the parent to be present during treatment advocate that parental presence eliminated child's separation anxiety and thus can also minimize the use of pre-medication. Parental presence can also enhance child's cooperation. With changing parenting trends parents want to be more active and involved in the welfare and well being of their kids. Allowing a parent in the operatory enhances parental satisfaction of playing an important role in their child's

well being. This can also facilitate stronger bonding between the child and the parents. Parents feel they are able to play a useful role and have a stronger bond with their child by being present during a high anxiety procedure.

Some professionals prefer to avoid parental presence in the dental office. It has been suggested that if parents are not present during the dental treatment, the parents can avoid anxiety associated with witnessing a dental procedure. If the parent has personal fear and anxiety of dental treatment, which might be stemming from their own previous dental experiences, they can influence the child negatively and transmit the anxiety to their child. In such cases, it will be beneficial to ask the parent to not be present during dental treatment of their child. This will be beneficial to the child as he/she will not be exposed their parent's anxiety, which can prevent a behavior management problem. Dentists who are not in favor of parental presence argue that parental presence can be a distraction for both the child and the health care professional (5). If the parent is not adequately trained prior to the procedure, the parent can not be very effective in forming a communication link between the dentist and their child.

Some dentists may not be comfortable in effectively using the voice control as an effective behavior modification technique in presence of the parent due to the fear of being considered rude and uncompassionate by the parent.

Similar to other behavior modification techniques, parental presence or absence cannot be effective for every pediatric patient. The dentist needs to evaluate every case individually based on the needs and requirements of the child and expectations and attitude of the parent towards accompanying their child during dental treatment.

Increasing number of parents are showing the willingness to accompany their child during dental treatment. If the dentist decides to include the parent during the procedure, the parent should be adequately prepared to play a positive role during the dental

experience of the child. The dentist may have to train and educate the parents regarding their role in the team to ultimately achieve positive behavior modification of the child. The parents form the part of the care giving team but play a low key role generally as “silent observers” (4). The parent should be prepared to ignore minor disruptive behavior of the child and refrain from “coaxing” or pleading to the child to stay calm or accept the dental treatment.

## CONCLUSION

Whatever the decision is, either to include or exclude the parent based on individual analysis of the child's behavior, it should be explained to the parent and other members of the health care team to prevent miscommunication and parental dissatisfaction. The decision to include the parent should be based upon the ultimate goal of achieving

positive behavior of the child and delivering safe and quality dental treatment.

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