

Dental Care for Children with Special Needs



If your child has a developmental disability, a behavioral issue or a physical limitation, it's important for you to find a dentist who can give dental care while accommodating your child's unique situation. Children with special needs—like mild anxiety disorders, Down syndrome and cerebral palsy—may need extra time or support when seeing a dentist.

Supports for Special Needs at the Dentist

Finding the right dentist for your child requires balancing your child's needs with the dentist's experience. Call or visit the dentist's office to find out if the dentist is familiar with your child's condition and how it could affect his or her oral health. Describe the special supports your child may need and ask whether the dentist can provide them. When looking for a dentist, think about these special supports and dentist qualifications:

- **PRE-APPOINTMENTS:** Does the dentist offer pre-appointments? A pre-appointment would give your child a chance to meet the dentist and see the exam room and equipment. This could help your child feel more comfortable and be more cooperative during the actual dental appointment.
- **ACCESSIBILITY:** Are the areas inside and outside the dentist's office accessible for your child? If your child uses a wheelchair, you'll want to find a dentist's office where the wheelchair will fit through the front door and in the examination room.
- **EXPERIENCE:** Dentists and their staff who have already cared for children with special needs may have developed strategies that could help support your child. They may also be able to give you advice on oral health home care, like tips for brushing teeth.
- **SPECIALIZED CLINICAL TRAINING:** Some general dentists and most pediatric dentists get special training to treat children with special needs. Before scheduling an appointment, find out whether the dentist has had such training.
- **SEDATION:** Some children may need general anesthesia, while others may need some mild sedation, which can be given by mouth or from an IV drip. Speak with the dentist about your child's options, and find out what he or she recommends for your child.

Steps to Finding the Right Dentist

These resources can help you find a dentist who can meet your child's special needs.

- Use the Insure Kids Now Dentist Locator on [InsureKidsNow.gov](https://www.insurekidsnow.gov) to find nearby dentists that accept Medicaid coverage. Enter your child's state, Medicaid plan name, and ZIP code or address. Hit "Search." Under the "More Information" column, look for the dentists that "Can Accommodate Special Needs." Before you make an appointment, call or visit the dentist's office to talk about your child's special needs.
- Family Voices is a network of experienced family members of children with special needs. Connect with Family Voices in your state at [FamilyVoices.org/states](https://www.familyvoices.org/states) to find information on a variety of topics, as well as referrals and support from other families.

Go to [InsureKidsNow.gov](https://www.insurekidsnow.gov) or call **1-877-KIDS-NOW (543-7669)** to learn more about **Medicaid** and the **Children's Health Insurance Program** and how to enroll your eligible child.

These programs cover the dental benefits children need.

