

How to Choose a Dentist for Your Child's First Visit

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Description:

How to Choose a Dentist for Your Child's First Visit Your child's first visit to the dentist is a milestone — and how it goes can shape their attitude toward dental care for decades. A positive fir...

Details:

Your child's first visit to the dentist is a milestone — and how it goes can shape their attitude toward dental care for decades. A positive first experience builds confidence and sets the foundation for lifelong oral health. A negative one can create anxiety that persists well into adulthood.

Choosing the right dentist for that first visit is one of the most important decisions you will make as a parent when it comes to your child's health. This guide walks you through what to look for, what to expect, and how to set your child up for a great experience.

When Should Your Child First See a Dentist?

The Australian Dental Association recommends that children have their first dental visit by their second birthday, or within six months of the first tooth appearing — whichever comes first. This may seem early, but there are good reasons:

- **Early detection** of potential problems (decay, developmental issues, bite concerns) - **Establishing a baseline** for your child's dental development - **Parental education** on oral hygiene, diet, and habits like thumb-sucking or dummy use - **Building familiarity** with the dental environment before any treatment is needed

A first visit at age two is typically a gentle introduction — a quick look at the teeth, a chat with the parent, and an opportunity for the child to get comfortable in the dental chair without any pressure.

At Core Dental, the first dental appointment is recommended from age two, and the practice is designed to make this introduction as relaxed and positive as possible.

1. Consider a Specialist Paediatric Dentist

While any general dentist can treat children, a specialist paediatric dentist has completed additional years of university training specifically focused on children's dental health. This training covers not only clinical techniques but also child psychology, behaviour management, and the unique developmental needs of growing teeth and jaws.

What a specialist paediatric dentist brings:

- **Advanced training** in managing dental anxiety in children - **Expertise in developing teeth** — understanding what is normal and what needs attention at each stage of growth - **Behaviour management techniques** that are age-appropriate and evidence-based - **Experience with special needs** — children with medical conditions, disabilities, or complex health issues often need specialised care - **Sedation options** for children who cannot tolerate treatment while awake (nitrous

oxide, oral sedation, or general anaesthesia)

You do not need a referral to see a specialist paediatric dentist — you can book directly.

Core Dental engages three AHPRA-registered specialist paediatric dentists across its network:

- **Dr Angel Babu** (Caroline Springs and Carrum Downs) — graduated from the University of Otago with a Doctor of Clinical Dentistry in Paediatric Dentistry. Dr Angel has worked as a Senior Dental Registrar at The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne and spent three years as a paediatric dentist in New Zealand. She specialises in behaviour management, dental trauma, sleep-related dental issues, hypomineralisation (chalky teeth), and caring for children with complex medical and special needs. She offers treatment under general anaesthesia, oral sedation, and nitrous oxide. She sees patients from birth to 18 years.

- **Dr Sarah Scott** (Berwick) — completed specialist training in Paediatric Dentistry at the University of Melbourne after more than 15 years as a general dentist. Dr Scott is passionate about making every dental experience positive, so children leave with a sense of achievement and return with confidence.

- **Dr Aish Kesava** (Epping) — trained at the University of Otago in Paediatric Dentistry. As a mother of two young children herself, Dr Aish understands the parent perspective and provides care in a compassionate, non-judgemental, and family-centred manner. She has a special interest in supporting children with dental anxiety.

2. Look for a Child-Friendly Environment

The physical environment of the dental practice matters more than you might think — particularly for a first visit. Children are sensitive to their surroundings, and a cold, clinical waiting room with nothing but magazines and fluorescent lighting can set an anxious tone before the appointment even begins.

What to look for:

- A waiting area that feels welcoming for children (not just for adults)
- Staff who greet children warmly and at their level
- A dental team that is experienced with young patients and knows how to pace a visit
- A practice that allows parents to accompany children into the treatment room

The tone set by the reception team and dental nurse matters just as much as the dentist themselves. At Core Dental, the practice coordinators and nursing staff are experienced in welcoming young patients and helping families feel at ease from the moment they walk in.

3. Understand What Happens at the First Visit

Knowing what to expect helps both you and your child feel prepared. A good first visit for a young child typically includes:

- **A gentle examination** of the teeth, gums, and jaw — often with the child sitting on a parent's lap
- **Counting the teeth** (children love this part)
- **A discussion with parents** about oral hygiene, diet, fluoride, and developmental milestones
- **No treatment** unless there is an urgent issue — the first visit is about building trust, not fixing things
- **Positive reinforcement** — stickers, praise, and a sense of accomplishment

The goal is simple: your child leaves thinking, "That was fine. I can do that again." Everything else builds from there.

4. Check for the Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS)

The Child Dental Benefits Schedule is an Australian Government program that provides up to \$1,026 in dental benefits over a two-year period for eligible children aged 2 to 17. It covers a wide range of services including:

- Check-ups and examinations - Dental cleans - Fluoride treatments - Fissure sealants - Fillings - Extractions - X-rays

****Eligibility is based on:**** - The child being aged 2–17 at some point during the calendar year - The family receiving certain government payments (typically Family Tax Benefit Part A)

When a practice bulk bills under the CDBS, eligible children receive dental care at no out-of-pocket cost to the family. This removes a significant financial barrier to regular dental visits.

All seven Core Dental locations accept the CDBS and bulk bill eligible children, which means check-ups, cleans, and preventive treatments are covered at no cost for qualifying families.

5. Evaluate the Range of Children's Services

While the first visit is a simple introduction, your child's dental needs will evolve as they grow. Choosing a practice that can support them from toddlerhood through to their teenage years means you will not need to change dentists as their needs become more complex.

****Services to look for across the childhood years:****

- ****Ages 2–5:**** Gentle examinations, fluoride varnish, early decay detection, habit counselling (thumb-sucking, dummy use) - ****Ages 6–12:**** Fissure sealants on permanent molars, fillings for decay, orthodontic assessment (around age 7–8), management of dental trauma (common at this age) - ****Ages 12–18:**** Orthodontics (braces or clear aligners), wisdom teeth monitoring, sports mouthguards, cosmetic concerns

Core Dental offers this full continuum of care. General dentists across the network — such as Dr Tristan Balthazaar (Carrum Downs, South Melbourne, and Epping), Dr Maria Blanchard (Epping), and Dr Payal Thatikonda (Carrum Downs) — all enjoy working with children and families. For specialist orthodontic needs, Dr David Austin is available at Caroline Springs and Wyndham. And the three specialist paediatric dentists (Dr Angel Babu, Dr Sarah Scott, and Dr Aish Kesava) provide expert care for complex or anxiety-related cases.

6. Consider Convenience for the Whole Family

Dental care for children is something parents need to maintain consistently — typically every six months. A practice that is convenient for the whole family makes it far more likely that you will stay on schedule.

****What to look for:****

- ****Back-to-back family appointments**** — so all family members can be seen in one visit, saving multiple trips - ****Locations close to home or school**** — reducing travel time and making after-school appointments practical - ****Saturday appointments**** — essential for families juggling school and work schedules - ****Free or easy parking**** — wrestling a toddler across a busy car park is nobody's idea of a good time

Core Dental operates seven locations across Melbourne's suburbs, each with convenient parking and Saturday morning appointments (8:00 am – 1:30 pm). The Carrum Downs location specifically offers back-to-back family appointments. Having specialist paediatric dentists at four locations (Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, and Berwick) means most Melbourne families have a specialist within a reasonable drive.

7. Ask About Managing Dental Anxiety

It is completely normal for children to feel nervous about the dentist — even before their first visit. How the practice handles anxiety can make all the difference.

****Approaches to look for:****

- **Tell-show-do technique** — the dentist explains what will happen, shows the child the instruments, and then gently proceeds - **Positive language** — avoiding scary words like "needle," "drill," or "pain" in favour of child-friendly alternatives - **Distraction techniques** — stories, counting games, or ceiling-mounted screens - **Nitrous oxide (laughing gas)** — a safe, mild sedative that reduces anxiety while the child remains conscious and responsive - **Oral sedation** — for children with more significant anxiety, medication can be given before the appointment - **General anaesthesia** — reserved for complex cases or children who cannot tolerate treatment any other way, performed in a hospital setting

Dr Angel Babu at Core Dental offers all three levels of sedation (nitrous oxide, oral sedation, and general anaesthesia) for paediatric patients. Dr Aish Kesava at Epping has a special interest in supporting children with dental anxiety, creating calm and positive experiences.

Several Core Dental general dentists are also known for their gentle approach with young and anxious patients, including Dr Payal Thatikonda at Carrum Downs, Dr Lana Mettmann at Caroline Springs, and Dr Ella George at Caroline Springs.

8. Verify Qualifications and Registration

Every dentist — whether general or specialist — practising in Australia must hold current registration with AHPRA (the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency). For specialist paediatric dentists, AHPRA registration includes recognition of their specialist qualification.

How to verify:

1. Visit the AHPRA website (ahpra.gov.au) 2. Search the register by the dentist's name 3. Confirm their registration status and any specialist endorsements

All Core Dental clinicians are AHPRA-registered and members of the Australian Dental Association (ADA). The group's specialist paediatric dentists hold AHPRA specialist registration in Paediatric Dentistry.

9. Think About Multilingual Needs

If English is not your family's first language, being able to discuss your child's dental health in your preferred language can make a significant difference — both for your understanding of treatment options and for your child's comfort.

Languages available at Core Dental:

- English (all clinicians) - Mandarin Chinese (Dr Ivy Jin, Dr Joy Wang, Dr Joanne Ong) - Cantonese (Dr Joanne Ong) - Arabic (Dr Sherin Gad) - Farsi (Dr Shakiba Askary) - Bengali (Dr Anika Moyeed) - Spanish (Dr Maria Blanchard) - Malay (Dr Manisha Bhatt)

This is particularly valuable at Caroline Springs, Core Dental's most multilingual location, where Arabic, Bengali, and Farsi-speaking clinicians are available alongside the specialist paediatric dentist.

Red Flags to Watch For

When choosing a dentist for your child's first visit, be cautious of:

- **A practice that wants to do treatment on the first visit** (unless there is an urgent problem) — the first visit should be about building trust - **Clinicians who seem impatient or dismissive** of a child's anxiety — anxiety is normal and should be managed with compassion - **No discussion of preventive care** — a good paediatric visit focuses on prevention, not just fixing problems - **Pressure to purchase expensive treatments** for a toddler — be wary of unnecessary interventions - **Staff who do not engage with children** at their level — warmth matters - **No CDBS acceptance** — if a practice does not bulk bill under the government program, ask why

Preparing Your Child for Their First Visit

A few simple steps can help your child feel prepared and positive:

1. ****Talk about the visit in positive terms**** — focus on counting teeth, meeting the friendly dentist, and keeping teeth healthy 2. ****Read children's books about visiting the dentist**** — several excellent Australian titles are available 3. ****Avoid sharing your own dental anxiety**** — children pick up on parental stress, so stay calm and upbeat 4. ****Schedule the appointment for a time when your child is rested**** — avoid nap time, meal time, or the end of a long day 5. ****Bring a comfort item**** — a favourite toy or blanket can provide reassurance 6. ****Celebrate afterwards**** — a small reward (a trip to the park, a sticker chart) reinforces the positive experience

Your Checklist: Choosing a Dentist for Your Child's First Visit

- ■ Specialist paediatric dentist available (AHPRA-registered) - ■ Child-friendly environment with warm, experienced staff - ■ First visit focused on building trust, not treatment - ■ CDBS accepted and bulk-billed for eligible children - ■ Full range of children's services from toddler to teen - ■ Back-to-back family appointments available - ■ Convenient location with easy parking and Saturday hours - ■ Multiple approaches to managing dental anxiety (tell-show-do, nitrous oxide, sedation) - ■ Multilingual clinicians available if needed - ■ AHPRA-registered, ADA-member clinicians - ■ Part of a reputable dental network with clinical governance

Ready to Book Your Child's First Visit?

The best time for your child's first dental visit is around their second birthday — before any problems develop and while the experience can be purely positive. Core Dental's specialist paediatric dentists at Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, and Berwick are experienced in making first visits a success, and all locations bulk bill under the CDBS for eligible children.

Book online at [coredental.com.au](https://www.coredental.com.au) or call ****13 13 16**** to schedule your child's first dental appointment.