

How to Choose a Paediatric Dentist for Your Child in Melbourne

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Description:

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Details:

Taking your child to the dentist for the first time can feel daunting — for you and for them. Choosing the right paediatric dentist sets the foundation for a lifetime of positive dental experiences. The right practitioner will not only treat your child's teeth but also build their confidence, ease their fears, and teach them habits that last well into adulthood.

This guide helps Melbourne parents understand what a paediatric dentist does, what to look for when choosing one, and how to make dental visits a positive part of your child's routine.

What Is a Paediatric Dentist?

A paediatric dentist (also called a paedodontist or specialist children's dentist) is a dental specialist who has completed an additional three years of postgraduate university training specifically focused on treating infants, children, adolescents, and patients with special needs. In Australia, paediatric dentists must hold specialist registration with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) — a credential you can verify online.

Paediatric dentists are trained in child psychology, behaviour management, growth and development of the teeth and jaws, and the treatment of dental conditions unique to children. They understand that a five-year-old is not simply a small adult — their dental needs, anxieties, and communication styles are fundamentally different.

When Should Your Child First See a Dentist?

The Australian Dental Association recommends a child's first dental visit by their second birthday, or within six months of their first tooth appearing — whichever comes first. Early visits are not about treatment; they are about familiarisation. Your child gets used to the dental environment, the sounds, and the experience of having someone look at their teeth in a safe, low-pressure setting.

Many parents wait until a problem arises — a toothache, a visible cavity, or a knocked tooth. By then, the child's first dental experience is associated with pain and anxiety. Starting early with a gentle, child-focused practitioner prevents this pattern.

Key Factors to Consider When Choosing a Paediatric Dentist

1. AHPRA Specialist Registration

Any dentist can treat children, but only an AHPRA-registered specialist paediatric dentist has completed the accredited postgraduate training. This distinction matters. Specialist paediatric dentists have spent three additional years learning how to manage dental anxiety in children, treat complex

paediatric conditions, and handle dental trauma — skills that go well beyond a standard dental degree.

Before booking, search the AHPRA register at ahpra.gov.au to confirm your child's dentist holds specialist registration in paediatric dentistry.

2. Experience with Different Age Groups

Children's dental needs change dramatically from infancy through adolescence. A good paediatric dentist should be comfortable treating:

- **Infants and toddlers (0–3 years)** — first dental visits, teething concerns, early bottle-related decay
- **Preschoolers (3–5 years)** — cavity prevention, fluoride application, habit management (thumb-sucking, dummies)
- **School-age children (6–12 years)** — mixed dentition (baby and adult teeth together), sealants, orthodontic screening
- **Adolescents (13–18 years)** — wisdom teeth, sports-related trauma, orthodontic needs, aesthetic concerns

At Core Dental, three AHPRA-registered specialist paediatric dentists serve families across Melbourne's suburbs:

- **Dr Angel Babu** practises at Core Dental Caroline Springs and Core Dental Carrum Downs. Dr Babu graduated from the University of Otago with a Doctor of Clinical Dentistry in Paediatric Dentistry and worked as a Senior Dental Registrar at The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne. Her special interests include behaviour management, dental trauma, sleep-related dental issues, management of high caries risk, hypomineralisation (chalky teeth), and care for children with complex medical and special needs. She offers treatment under general anaesthesia, oral sedation, and nitrous oxide (laughing gas) and treats patients from birth to 18 years.

- **Dr Sarah Scott** practises at Core Dental Berwick. Dr Scott graduated from the University of Sydney before completing specialist training in Paediatric Dentistry at the University of Melbourne. With more than 15 years of experience as a general dentist prior to specialising, she brings a wealth of clinical knowledge and a warm, encouraging approach that helps children leave feeling proud of their visit.

- **Dr Aish Kesava** practises at Core Dental Epping. Dr Kesava completed specialist training at the University of Otago, New Zealand, and has a particular interest in supporting children with dental anxiety. As a mother of two young children herself, she understands the parent perspective and provides care in a compassionate, non-judgemental, and family-centred manner.

3. Child-Friendly Environment and Approach

The physical environment matters. A practice that caters to children should feel welcoming, not clinical. Look for:

- Waiting areas designed with children in mind
- Age-appropriate explanations of procedures (show-tell-do technique)
- A calm, patient approach — not rushed or dismissive
- Options for anxious children, including distraction techniques, nitrous oxide sedation, or general anaesthesia for complex cases

Core Dental's specialist paediatric dentists use age-appropriate behaviour management techniques tailored to each child's temperament and developmental stage. Dr Angel Babu, for example, offers nitrous oxide (laughing gas), oral sedation, and general anaesthesia options for children who need additional support.

4. Handling Dental Anxiety

Dental anxiety in children is common and, if poorly managed, can persist into adulthood. The best paediatric dentists recognise anxiety as normal and have specific strategies to address it:

- Gradual desensitisation across multiple visits - Positive reinforcement and praise - Tell-show-do techniques (explaining what will happen before it happens) - Sedation options when needed (nitrous oxide, oral sedation, general anaesthesia) - A "no judgement" approach — no shaming, no forcing

Dr Aish Kesava at Core Dental Epping has a particular focus on children with dental anxiety, creating calm, positive experiences that build trust over time. Her own experience as a parent informs her patient, understanding approach.

5. Location and Convenience

Regular dental visits should be easy to maintain. If the practice is far from home or school, appointments become harder to keep — especially with busy family schedules. A suburban practice close to your child's school, near your regular shopping centre, or on your commute home makes ongoing care far more practical.

Core Dental's specialist paediatric dentists are distributed across Melbourne's suburbs, so families do not need to travel to the CBD for specialist children's dental care:

- ****Caroline Springs**** (western suburbs) and ****Carrum Downs**** (south-eastern suburbs / Mornington Peninsula) — Dr Angel Babu - ****Berwick**** (south-eastern suburbs) — Dr Sarah Scott - ****Epping**** (northern suburbs) — Dr Aish Kesava

All locations offer free or ample parking, are open Monday to Friday from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm and Saturday mornings, and welcome back-to-back family appointments so siblings can be seen on the same day.

6. The Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS)

The Australian Government's Child Dental Benefits Schedule provides up to \$1,026 in dental benefits over a two-year period for eligible children aged 2 to 17. Services covered include examinations, X-rays, cleaning, fissure sealing, fillings, root canals, and extractions.

All Core Dental locations bulk-bill under the CDBS for eligible children, meaning there is no out-of-pocket cost for covered services. This can significantly reduce the financial burden of regular paediatric dental care. Check your child's eligibility through Medicare or ask the Core Dental team when booking.

7. Continuity of Care

Children benefit from seeing the same dentist over time. A familiar face builds trust, and the dentist develops a thorough understanding of your child's dental history, developmental milestones, and behavioural patterns. Look for a practice where your child can maintain an ongoing relationship with their paediatric dentist rather than seeing a different practitioner each visit.

Core Dental's specialist paediatric dentists work at consistent locations, allowing families to build long-term relationships. And because Core Dental is a multi-location network, the general dentists and hygienists at each practice — such as Dr Tristan Balthazaar, Dr Maria Blanchard, Dr Payal Thatikonda, and dental hygienists Alexis Martinez and Isabelle Sayers — can provide routine care between specialist visits, keeping everything under one roof.

8. Communication with Parents

A good paediatric dentist communicates clearly with parents about:

- What they found during the examination - What treatment is recommended and why - Preventive strategies you can implement at home - When the next visit should be scheduled - Costs and payment options, in writing

Look for a practice that provides written treatment plans with anticipated costs upfront. All Core Dental locations provide itemised treatment plans before any work begins, so there are no surprises.

Red Flags to Watch For

Be cautious if:

- **The dentist is not a registered specialist** and you were told or assumed they were. Check AHPRA registration.
- **Your child is consistently distressed** after visits, and the dentist dismisses your concerns about their approach.
- **Treatment is recommended without clear explanation.** You should always understand what is being done and why.
- **The practice cannot accommodate children's specific needs**, such as sedation options for anxious patients or treatment for children with disabilities.
- **There is no discussion of prevention.** Paediatric dentistry should focus on keeping teeth healthy, not just fixing problems.

What to Expect at Your Child's First Visit

A first visit to a paediatric dentist is typically brief and gentle:

1. **Introduction** — meeting the dentist, exploring the chair, learning about the tools
2. **Examination** — a gentle look at your child's teeth, gums, and bite
3. **Cleaning** — if your child is comfortable, a light clean and fluoride application
4. **Discussion** — the dentist talks you through their findings and any recommendations
5. **Positive reinforcement** — stickers, a small reward, and plenty of praise

The goal is for your child to leave feeling good about the experience. Treatment, if needed, usually begins at a subsequent appointment once your child is comfortable.

Multilingual Care for Melbourne's Diverse Families

Melbourne is one of the most multicultural cities in the world, and dental care should be accessible to all families regardless of language background. Core Dental engages clinicians who speak a range of languages including Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic, Farsi, Bengali, Spanish, and Malay — in addition to English. If communicating in your first language would help you or your child feel more comfortable, ask the team when booking.

Questions to Ask When Choosing a Paediatric Dentist

1. Are you an AHPRA-registered specialist paediatric dentist?
2. What age range do you treat?
3. What sedation options are available for anxious children?
4. Do you have experience with children who have special needs or complex medical conditions?
5. Do you bulk-bill under the Child Dental Benefits Schedule?
6. What is your approach to behaviour management with young children?
7. Can I stay with my child during treatment?
8. What preventive care do you recommend for my child's age?

Why Melbourne Families Choose Core Dental

Core Dental is part of the Smile Solutions Group, bringing the clinical standards and specialist expertise of one of Melbourne's most established dental organisations to convenient suburban locations. With three AHPRA-registered specialist paediatric dentists across four locations, families across Melbourne's north, west, south-east, and bayside suburbs can access specialist children's dental care close to home.

Every Core Dental practice is staffed by ADA-member clinicians, features HICAPS on-site for instant health fund claims, and offers interest-free payment plans through Payright (from \$1,000 to \$20,000). With the Child Dental Benefits Schedule bulk-billed at all locations, quality paediatric dental care is within reach for every Melbourne family.

Book Your Child's Appointment

Whether it is your child's very first dental visit or you are looking for a specialist paediatric dentist closer to home, Core Dental can help. Book an appointment at the location most convenient for your family.

****Book online at coredental.com.au or call 13 13 16.****