

## A MESSAGE FOR PARENTS: My thoughts and feelings about pediatric dentistry

### Finding a pediatric dentist:

As a parent, I understand how difficult and stressful it can be when choosing a health care provider for our children. Here are my opinions on how to find the right dentist for your child:

-Find a dentist and dental staff whom you feel comfortable with and can communicate with. This will be a long term relationship and you will see this dentist for many years and appointments.

-Its very important to know what options your pediatric dentist offers in the case your child will need dental work. There are many different ways to treat a nervous or young child and it is ultimately a parent's decision to choose which option they feel is right for their child.

Below is a list of the most common sedative techniques in dentistry for children:

No sedation - There are many children who are able to tolerate dentistry just like an adult would. Our goal is to get every patient in this category.

Nitrous oxide (laughing gas) - This is the safest sedative option dentists have, giving children a "floaty feeling" which reduces anxiety and has some analgesic properties. In our office nitrous oxide is typically used on children (patients older than 4yrs of age) who are able to open their mouths and breathe through their nose at the same time. If a child is crying, the nitrous oxide will have no effects and the sedation effects are negated. Our office provides the nitrous oxide option and feels it works very well in the right situation.

Oral medications/conscious sedation - This technique involves oral medication(s) that helps to relax a child during dental treatment. There are many different levels of conscious sedation (mild, moderate and deep) as well as different medications that are used in pediatric dentistry. Our office offers mild conscious sedation for young or anxious children who need extensive dental work or when difficult procedures need to be performed. We routinely perform mild sedations which allows us to complete the most extensive and complicated cases in 2 appointments.

Hospital dentistry/general anesthesia- When you hear these terms, this means having your child undergo general anesthesia and put to sleep in a hospital to complete their dental work. I personally am strongly against this method for **young or healthy children** as **I could never fathom putting my own children or a healthy child under general anesthesia** for dental work. Seeing a child intubated through their noses with multiple strong medications flowing through their bodies to induce sedation in my mind is overkill for dentistry since these procedures can easily be done in office. I do believe in general anesthesia for children with special needs or severe medical issues (ex., tetralogy of fallot). I think that sometimes this method of sedation is used to make things easier for the dentist rather than having a child's best interest in mind.

I want to briefly review why general anesthesia should be avoided if possible. The first reason GA should be avoided has to do with the potential effects on children. There are numerous animal studies that have shown that inhalational anesthetics in addition to injected anesthetics like ketamine and propofol are neurotoxic. They cause nerve cell death in developing animals. There are several retrospective human studies that have shown potential problems. One of the most publicized studies from the Mayo Clinic in 2012 showed: **"Children repeatedly exposed to procedures requiring general anesthesia before age 2 years are at increased risk for the later development of ADHD."** While prospective studies are still in progress, I feel that there is enough evidence showing that GA can affect children, and if there's an alternative to using GA, it should be pursued. There are also obvious inherent immediate risks to GA - reactions to the anesthetics which can lead to other health problems. There is nothing safer than completely avoiding it if possible and this is my personal opinion.

### **What makes our practice special:**

We are a comprehensive pediatric dental office that has the most up to date equipment in the dental field and are able to offer a multitude of services at the highest standards.

We provide "HONEST" dentistry which basically means that everything we do is purely in the best interest of your child and that we don't treat dentistry like a business! With our conservative treatment planning/options for baby teeth, our intention is reduce the amount of dentistry performed as we do everything possible to let baby teeth fall out with decay! Of course there are some risk factors to consider when taking this approach but I am totally against treating every single cavity on baby teeth.

We offer **comprehensive orthodontics**. There are certain circumstances where early orthodontic treatment can prevent things such as orthognathic surgery in cases such as skeletal underbites or severe overjets. Being able to do orthodontics allows us to oversee oral hygiene while in braces and most importantly, allows a patient to start braces when ready without feeling pressured to start treatment. We have the best digital scanner (Itero scanner) on the market that allows us to take digital/computerized impressions which are more accurate and comfortable than the prior or traditional alginate impressions.

**Laser dentistry** gives us the ability to perform many procedures (fillings, soft tissue procedures) without having to give shots and prevents a child from dealing with being numb 3-4 hours after an appointment. Removing decay with a laser eliminates that eerie high pitched grinding sounds on your teeth from the dental drill as well as allowing a lot of soft tissue procedures to be performed without anesthetic and sutures. Patients who use the laser can eat right away after a procedure since they are not numb! But the truth is the laser is not for everyone and is not always pain free.

We perform **in office** (no general anesthesia) **tongue and lip tie removals** for infants who are having difficulties with latching during nursing or are failing to thrive. We are also performing soft tissue procedures on children with speech problems, swallowing issues and also removing non malignant soft tissue lesions. Our CO2 laser allows us to perform these procedures with complete revisions, no stitches, little bleeding and the quickest recovery possible.

**Esthetic white anterior crowns** One of the hardest and most challenging procedures in pediatric dentistry is the placement of esthetic/white crowns on children's front teeth. For years we have been routinely doing this procedure with parent satisfaction. I take this to be the most technique sensitive procedure in pediatric dentistry and we have found a technique that allows the best results possible. One of a parent's major fears are silver caps on your child's front teeth and not only do we have options with the white caps, but we have excellent results.

2 week guarantee for appointments. The reason for this is not because of a lack of patients (we typically see over 90 patients a day) its because we do quality dental work and have a system to get kids decay under control. We will never be an office where you have to wait for 2 months to get dental work done.

We are full time in 1 location and are available 5 days a week. All active patients have direct access to my cell phone number

Our office does not accept referrals from other dentists. Its common in dentistry for a dentist to see young patients in their office but when the child needed dental work done, they will refer this patient to a pediatric dentists. Once the dental work is completed by the pediatric dentist, the referring dentist would want the patient to return to their office for cleanings. I feel there were a lot of negatives with these type of arrangements and it really affected the child the most. Without getting into details, I would just say that if the dentist your child goes to can't do the work on your child, its probably best to get them established with a pediatric dentist.

I am a strong believer that a great dental office requires exceptional employees. I employ a large number of full time staff members to assist you and your children with personalized attention to have the best dental experience possible.

**Committed Patients Required:** All I ask is that I have a committed parents who are willing to be consistent with their children's dental appointments. We will inactivate patients from our practice who routinely break appointments or have not been to our practice in a 2 year period. Although this does not sit well with certain people, its a rule we have and there are obvious reasons for this.

### Miscellaneous information:

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that a child should go to the dentist within six months of getting their first tooth or no later than their first birthday. Especially for first time parents, there is a very important step to follow.

I mentioned above that choosing the right pediatric dentist for your children can be very overwhelming. The best advice I could give you in finding a good dentist is through word of mouth!!!! There are many paid advertisements in magazines and social media venues which are out there to hopefully attract your attention. Asking your friends, neighbors, and co-workers about their opinions of their child's dentist will be true and not misleading. In your quest to find a good pediatric dentist: (1) make sure he/she is a pediatric dentist. Hawaii allows general/family dentists to market themselves as "children's dentists" even though they have not gone through a residency program which usually is an extra 2-3 years of formal training after dental school. However, general dentists they cannot say or refer themselves to as "pediatric dentists" so this is something you can use to weed out who is and who is not a trained specialist. (2) Social media can be helpful but at the same time extremely misleading. Be wary when reading positive or negative comments...there are always two sides to every story. (3) After your first meeting with your pediatric dentist, make sure you are comfortable with both doctor and staff members. Don't feel hesitant to ask questions. Your child is your most prized possession so no question is too trivial. (4) If you don't feel the office is a good fit for your child, try another office! You always need to have a good feeling about your child's health care provider.

### **The most sensitive topics in pediatric dentistry**

Parents of young children are welcome to accompany their child for their initial visit and all future cleaning appointments. However, when any dental operative procedures such as fillings, crowns, etc. need to be performed, we kindly ask that parents remain in the waiting room. With that being said, there are many times where we feel having the parent in the room will make the treatment go smoother and in these cases I will ask you to help with the procedure. But a hard fact to accept for many parents is that many times having a parent in the room can make it harder on your child, thus making the appointment take longer and affecting the quality of dental work being performed. Treating young or anxious patients can be very challenging and stressful for children, parents and even the dentist. So I ask every parent to allow me to make the final decision on whether or not they are allowed to be in the room. If its an absolute must to be in the room during operative procedure, I believe that there are offices out there that may be better suited for your child.

Oral sedation and Nitrous Oxide are offered as options for young or nervous patients and is not forced upon any parent who feels uncomfortable with its use. My objective is to help your child be as comfortable as possible during their dental procedure. By keeping them relaxed, this will affect the quality of the restoration being placed as well as making the overall experience a better one. Using an oral sedative or Nitrous Oxide can also help reduce the number of appointments needed for larger treatment plans as it can help keep a child comfortable for a longer period of time. Sedation has been recognized as safe when administered correctly and its use has also been deemed safe by our national association, The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry.

The flat out truth is that dental work is one of the worst experiences that we have to go through in our lives. Other than cleanings, there is nothing fun about having your teeth worked on. The shots, the drill, the post op numb feeling, the high pitched grinding sounds on your teeth .... its all miserable, but in most times necessary. As adults its hard to tolerate and its even worse

when young children need to go through this. Don't expect every appointment to go smoothly and although we try to avoid crying or having your child being traumatized after operative appointments, the truth is it happens. So the best thing to do is to start your child with a dentist at a young age, and lets try and prevent cavities together as a team!

My hope is that the information gives you a little insight as to what our practice philosophies are and provide you with some knowledge about pediatric dentistry. Thank you very much for taking the time to read this, and I wish you the best of luck in finding a pediatric dentist that you trust and feel comfortable with.

All the Best,

Dr. Derek Tom