



**MEMBER
FEATURE**
PEER-TO-PEER ARTICLE

LET'S TALK EMPATHY

MEMBER ARTICLE
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Do you remember the sheer joy of going to the dentist as a child? NO? Then perhaps your experiences were a lot like mine: sitting in a small, dark room devoid of any conversation or interest in my feelings. The expectations were simple: sit down, open wide, and behave while the bare-handed dentist cleaned and examined my teeth. When my appointment was complete, and I had complied, I was able to look in a treasure chest and pick out a pencil. There were only ever pencils.

The experiences that we try to create in our pediatric office today are built on empathy. We want our patients to know we are recognizing and acknowledging their feelings. It starts the moment we greet the patient on their level, and continues throughout the entire appointment by engaging them in conversation about their interests and hobbies. It is also reflected in our ability to address their needs, ease their anxiety, and anticipate any concerns they may have.

Remember the rule of putting yourself in someone else's shoes? This is the time to do so. Sit next to them, make eye contact, and talk with them, not at them. Explain the steps of the appointment and introduce them to each instrument or tool along the way. Make the language clear but fun by using silly terms like "Mr. Thirsty," "tickle toothbrush," "sugar bug scooper," etc. Let them know that they are active participants in a team effort. For example, if you are placing sealants, let them touch the end of the bristle brush, so they know it is not sharp. Show them that the etch syringe is, indeed, not a needle by dispensing a small amount onto your glove. You have shown empathy and gained their trust, which results in easier placement and more content patient. This goes for all ages and aspects of a dental visit.

Offering comforting items will also help. Have options on hand: blankets for warmth, ear plugs/blue tooth headphones to help drown out noise, neck cushions for support, essential oil options, weighted blankets for sensory patients, etc.

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...EMPATHY CONTINUED

Is your patient anxious because they did not have the opportunity to brush prior to their appointment? The small gesture of having disposable toothbrushes, toothpaste, and mouthwash available upon their arrival will infer you care about their needs. Make them comfortable in the chair by asking, "are you comfortable?" or by stating, "raise your hand if you need a break." If they have a long procedure, you can play a movie, listen to music, or offer a TMJ massage to help ease the discomfort of staying open for an extended time. Be creative!

If you're treating kids, don't forget to tend to the parent; anxiety is most often displayed in a parent who previously experienced dental trauma. Remember

to engage them in conversation to help ease their concerns. Ask them about happenings in their life as well. A little empathy can go a long way. Take time to write notes about their family, vacations, and pets so that you'll have fun things to discuss at their next visit.

Let's take a moment to remember that it is our job, as administrators, assistants, hygienists and doctors, to show patients empathy. Each patient deserves the best experience you can provide for them. Happy people become dedicated, trustworthy patients. They feel at ease in their "dental home" and encourage others to seek out your practice. This, in turn, will grow your dental business. Not only that, but you can also rejoice in the fact that a referral is one of the biggest compliments you can receive for all your hard work and dedication. ■



MEET THE MEMBER

Stacey Singleton, DAADOM has been in the dental field since 1997. She is a Certified and Expanded Function Dental Auxiliary in Maine & New Hampshire and also holds her Business Administration Management Degree from Hesser College. She is the Practice Administrator for Harborside Dental and York County Pediatric Dentistry in addition to being an active member and founding president of the Maine AADOM Chapter. Stacey is also a Dental Adjunct Professor at YCCC's dental assistant program.

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