

## **A Guide for Parents:**

### **What Not to Say When I am Treating Your Child**

A quick glance into your waiting room, or a whispered comment by your dental assistant, and you realize that you might have a rough time with your next patient, an obviously anxious child.

So, you and your dedicated team put on your most kindly faces, project a tranquil and friendly demeanor, establish a quiet and relaxed environment, and try to mesmerize the child into being a good patient.

And then, has this ever happened to you?

Suddenly, just when you have succeeded in getting the child to be composed, compliant, and cooperative, the parent blurts out a loud, inappropriate comment that ruins everything?

In order to avoid such happenstances, I present the ultimate list of what parents should **not** say in front of their children in the dental office.

#### **1. “Don’t worry; he’s not going to do anything today.”**

Until you uttered that very unhelpful phrase, it may never have occurred to the child that he, in fact, should worry.

And, do you realize that by telling the child not to worry because I am “not going to do anything,” it implies that if I ever have to actually “do something,” it should be a legitimate cause for very real and tangible worry?

#### **2. “He wants you to open your mouth.”**

When we ask little Johnny to open his mouth, we really don’t need you to translate our request into English. By your speaking up, you kind of break the

spell; the child, instead of being focused on us and listening to our voice, focuses instead on you.

### **3. “Don’t worry; I won’t let him hurt you!”**

Is that comment really helpful? Is it you and the child united against the big, bad dentist?

Instead, you should be teaching your child that you and the dental team are partners, and that we can be trusted to take good care of the child.

### **4. “Have you ever done a procedure like this before?”**

No, I never have. But, I did review that chapter in the dental textbook last night.

### **5. “Are you giving her a shot?”**

When we tell your child that we are putting “sleepy water” on the tooth, we are not trying to be silly. We chose our words carefully, because we realize (and so should you!) that the spoken word has a powerful effect.

So, humor us and play along with us, when we clean (not “drill”), or wiggle (not “pull out”) a tooth.

### **6. “Is this going to hurt a lot?”**

What scale of parental comprehension leads you to believe that such a comment helps create a relaxing atmosphere for your child?

### **7. “I told you not to eat candy! It’s your fault that this is going to hurt!”**

Does that help relax the child? Do you really want him to feel that our treatment is a punishment?

And, by the way, since your child doesn’t have an independent source of income for purchasing candy, we tend to blame his supplier (you!).

I realize that my list may not be completely definitive, and encourage readers to submit any additional suggestions.

It is so very easy for parents to hinder the rapport that we are trying to establish with their children. An ill-considered comment by a parent can completely destroy the relaxed mood that we attempt to create.

In order to avoid such thoughtless comments impacting negatively on a child's conduct, many dentists do not allow parents into the operatory. In our office, we encourage parents to stay with their children in our treatment room, but advise that "a silent, smiling, parental presence is extremely helpful."