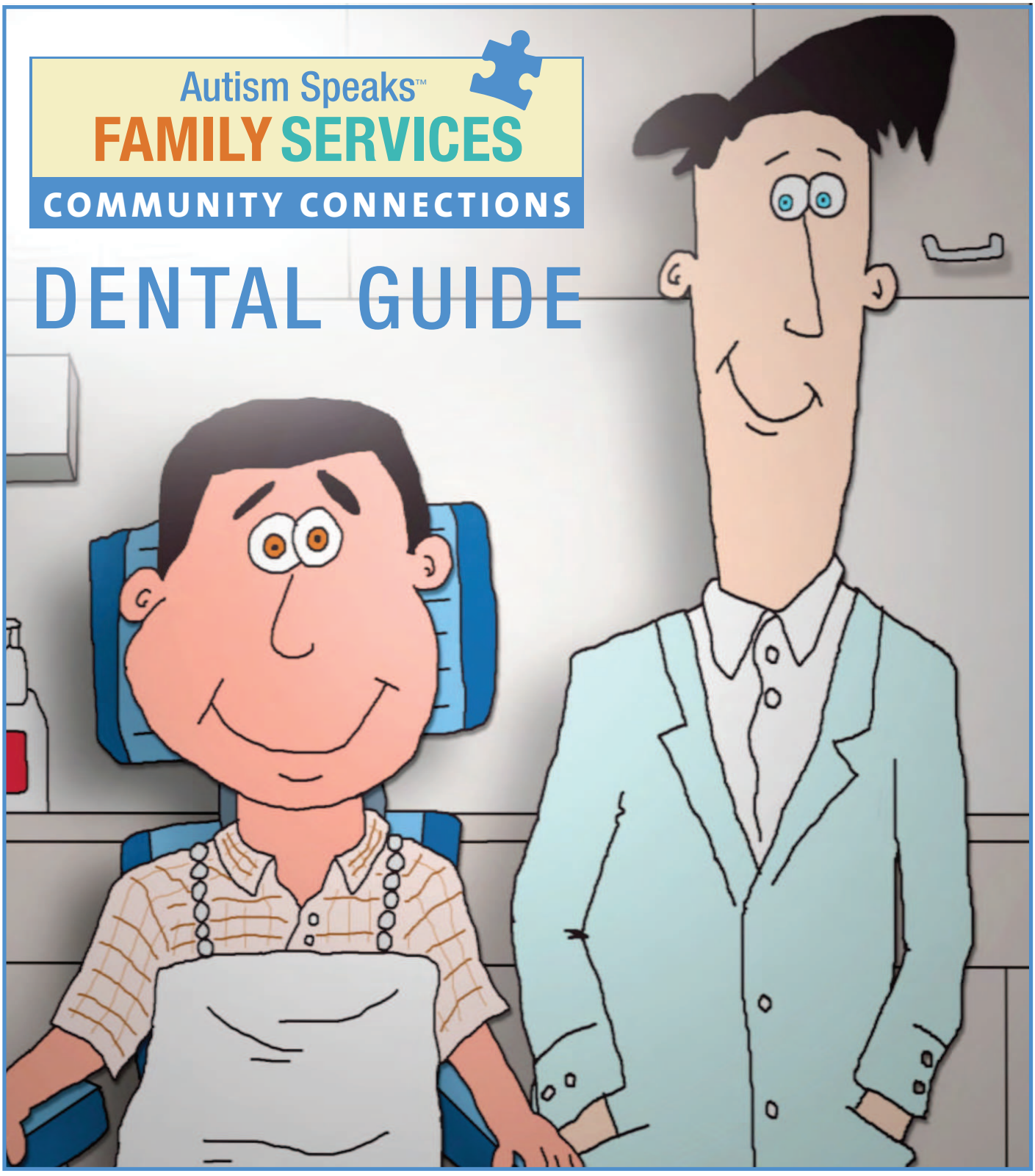
Autism Speaks™

FAMILY SERVICES

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

DENTAL GUIDE



Colgate®

PHILIPS sonicare the sonic toothbrush

AUTISM SPEAKS™ It's time to listen.

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For Families

Getting Started at Home

Oral health is a very important component of healthy daily living. But for some children with autism, oral health habits can be challenging. Our hope is that this guide will provide information for families to help begin a lifetime of good oral care.

To get started, you and your child should pick out the right toothbrush. There are many colors, styles, and types available. It is important that the brush is the right size for your child's mouth and that it has soft bristles.

For some children with autism, brushing teeth can be difficult. The sensation can be uncomfortable at first, and the child may need to be desensitized. You may want to start by using the toothbrush to touch your child's lips or just inside the mouth. You may also want to teach your child to "open wide," so that this direction is understood. Showing your child how you brush your own teeth may also be helpful.

Brushing and Flossing

Brushing Your Child's Teeth

- Stand behind your child with their head on your chest.
- Put a pea size amount of toothpaste on the center of the brush.
- Guide the brush as if you were brushing your own teeth.
- There are six steps to brushing:

1. Brush the outside, inside and tops of the bottom back teeth on one side of the mouth five times.
2. Move up and brush the inside, outside and chewing surfaces of the top teeth five times.
3. Brush the bottom front teeth outside and inside five times.
4. Move to the opposite side and brush the bottom teeth outside and inside five times.
5. Brush the top front teeth inside, outside, and chewing surfaces five times.
6. Brush the opposite top back teeth inside, outside, and chewing surfaces five times.

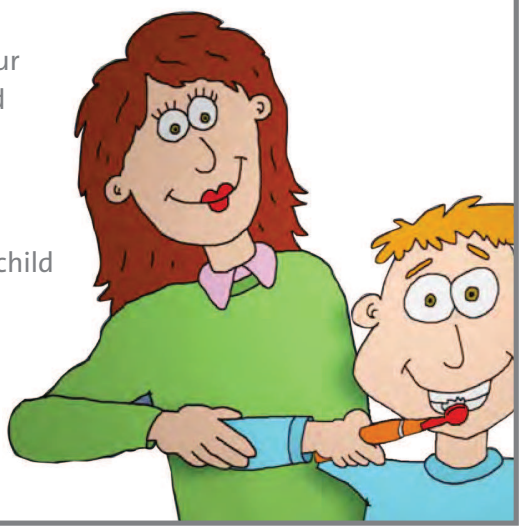
Although most people brush their teeth in the bathroom, in order to accommodate your child and get them accustomed to brushing their teeth, you may want to do this on the couch or in another part of your home where they may feel more comfortable. The ultimate goal is for your child to brush their teeth as independently as possible.

Flossing

Another important oral health skill that should be mastered is flossing. Just like brushing, this should be introduced as soon as possible in small steps, while building upon each success.

- The same technique is used in putting your child's head on your chest and flossing as you would your own teeth.
- Floss one tooth at a time.

Again, the goal is always for your child to achieve independence in this task.



Other Tips

Other Tips That May Be Helpful

- Some families find it useful to use a timer so that the individual with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can see when the task will be over.
- Some individuals with autism benefit from visual supports and schedules. A visual schedule can be created by taking photographs of the steps outlined on the previous page.
  - Families can then print the pictures and create visual schedules for their child. Some families may print the page and check off the activities as they occur. The pages can be laminated and a dry erase marker can be used to check off each activity, this way the page can be reused.
  - Others may cut out the photos and laminate them, and place Velcro on the back of each photo. The photos are arranged in chronological order on a board, and as each step is completed, the corresponding picture is removed.
- Another option is to photograph each step of the teeth brushing process, load the pictures on to a digital picture frame and program it so that each photo is displayed for 10 second intervals. This can be used in the bathroom as they are brushing their teeth so that they have a visual prompt when it is time to move on to the next step.*
- Some individuals need to be reinforced with verbal praise or a reward after each step. Others may be able to complete some, many, or all of the steps before verbal praise or a treat is needed. Each child will need to work at their own pace to achieve the skills necessary to brush their teeth.

  Once a manual toothbrush has been mastered, then a power brush can be introduced. The power brush is slightly different in that the brush does the work, so the individual no longer needs to do the "brushing."

  In all cases, the ultimate goal is for the individual with autism to brush their teeth as independently as possible.

*This type of visual support was developed by Gloria Satriale, Executive Director of PAAL (Preparing Adolescents for Adult Life).

Preparing for the Dental Visit

Finding the Right Dental Office

It is important to find a dentist that works successfully with individuals with autism. You may find a dentist in your local area in the Autism Speaks Resource Guide. (*www.AutismSpeaks.org/community/resources*)

You may want to find out if the dentist has a questionnaire that you can fill out before your appointment. If not, you can use the one provided in this guide.

Speak with the dentist before the appointment.

- Let the dentist know what time of day works best for your child.
- Describe any concerns or challenges that may present themselves during the visit.
- See if they have pictures of the office so you can review them with your child before the appointment.

Preparing for the Dental Visit

You may want to prepare your child before going to the dentist. For some children, a visual schedule can be helpful to let them know what will happen throughout the visit. *You can find information about visual schedules on page 6, and you can find an actual visual schedule on page 7 of this Guide*. You can also practice having your child sit in a reclining chair. You may have to teach each of the following steps so that they understand the directions from the dental professional.

- Putting their hands on their stomach
- Putting their feet out straight
- Opening wide
- Holding their mouth open
- Counting their teeth
- Cleaning with a power brush
- Taking X-Rays
- Spitting into the sink

Each step may need to be mastered individually. Many of the instruments used at a dental visit can be bought at a drugstore. These would include:

- Small flashlight
- Dental mirror
- Rubber-tipped gum massager

You may also be able to get some dental bite wings from their dentist in advance of the visit, so that your child may practice biting down on the dental bite wings when they need to have X-Rays taken.

Visual Schedule

Individuals with autism often benefit from visual supports and schedules. The following visual schedule outlines the steps necessary for a dental visit. Families are welcome to print the pictures and create a visual schedule for their child. Some families may print the page and check off the activities as they occur. The pages can be laminated and a dry erase marker can be used to check off each activity, this way the page can be reused for each visit. Others may cut out the photos and laminate them, and place Velcro on the back of each photo. The photos are arranged in chronological order on a board, as each step is completed the picture is removed.

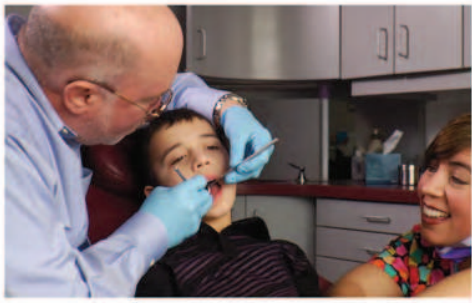
Some children may need to be reinforced with verbal praise, a preferred item, or a reward after each step. Others may be able to complete some, many or all of the steps before verbal praise or a reward is given. Each child will need to work at their own pace to achieve the skills necessary for a dental visit.

Visual Schedule for a Dentist Visit

1 Put hands on stomach ☐

2 Feet out straight ☐

3 Open mouth wide ☐



4 Hold mouth open ☐

5 Count teeth ☐

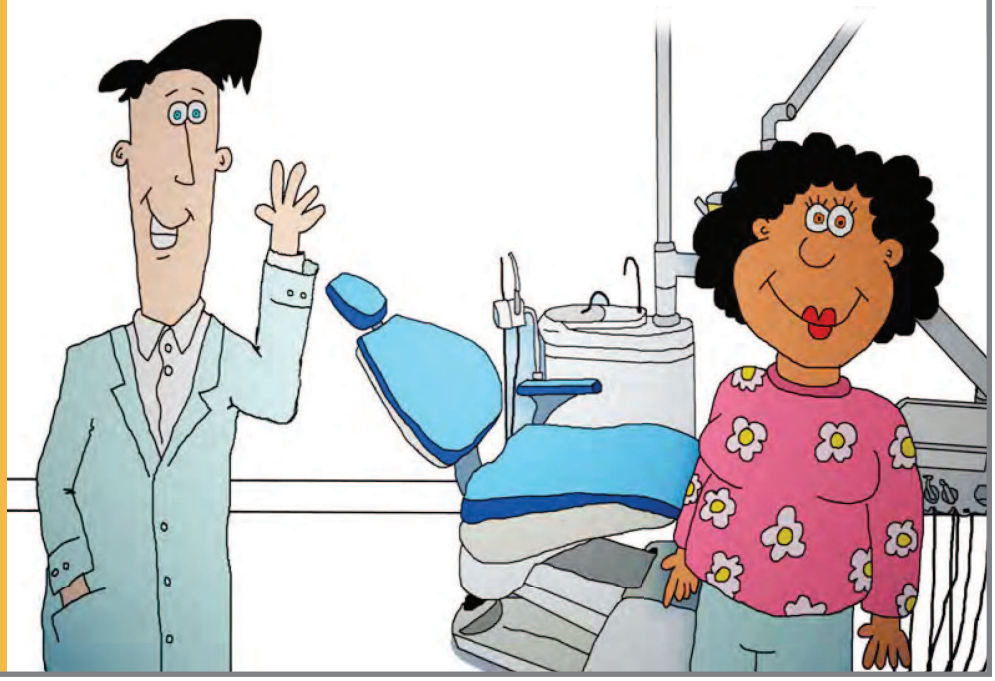
6 Take X-Rays ☐

7 Clean teeth ☐

8 Spit into sink ☐

Meeting the Dentist

Your child will most likely meet the dentist in the waiting area. You may want to call ahead to see if the dentist is running on time. If they are delayed and you think that your child may be anxious in the waiting area, you may want to ask the receptionist if you could wait in the car, and ask them to call you on your cell phone when the dentist is ready. Bring a favorite toy or reward for a job well done. You may also want to bring a family member, teacher, or autism expert to help make the visit a success.



For the Dentist

What is Autism?

Autism is a general term used to describe a group of complex developmental brain disorders known as Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD). The other pervasive developmental disorders are PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified), Asperger Syndrome, Rett Syndrome and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder. Many parents and professionals refer to this group as autism spectrum disorders (ASD). ASD affects 1 in 110 children, and 1 in 70 boys.

Individuals with ASD have difficulties with:

- Social Interactions
- Communication
- Difficulty relating or participating in a back-and-forth conversation or interaction
- Repetitive or stereotypical behavior
- Individuals with ASD may also be hypersensitive or hyposensitive to light, sound, touch, smell, or taste.

Advice for Dental Experts

- Develop a relationship with your patient with autism.
- Speak in a calm and soothing voice.
- Get down to the child's level and be confident and reassuring.
- Do not ask the child if they want to come with you, but rather gently tell the child what you are doing next.
- Be consistent.

For the Dentist

Getting Your Office Ready

Since each child with autism is different, some suggestions may work for one patient with autism, but not for another. Ask the parent first if there are often suggestions that may better meet the needs of your patient with an ASD.

- Dim the lights if necessary.
- Turn down loud noises.
- Turn on instruments so that the child can see them before the instruments go in their mouths.
- Remove the clutter in your office that may distract the child or make them anxious.
- Let the child know what you will be doing. You may want to show the child on their hand how you will be counting their teeth so that they know what is going to happen.
- Make sure to provide clear and accurate information when speaking to the child.
- End each visit on a positive note, so that you and your patient can build upon your success.

Sometimes it may take several visits in order to complete a dental exam. If you work with the family on this process, you will build a relationship together that will result in a life time of good dental health for children with autism.

About Us

About Autism Speaks™

Autism Speaks is the North America's largest autism science and advocacy organization, dedicated to funding research into the causes, prevention, treatments and a cure for autism; increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorders; and advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families.

Autism Speaks funds more than $30 million each year in new autism research, in addition to supporting the Autism Treatment Network, Autism Genetic Resource Exchange, Autism Clinical Trials Network, Autism Tissue Program and a range of other scientific and medical programs.

Notable awareness initiatives include the establishment of the annual United Nations-sanctioned World Autism Awareness Day on April 2 and an award-winning, multi-year national public service advertising campaign with the Ad Council. Autism Speaks' family services efforts include the Autism Video Glossary, a 100 Day Kit for newly-diagnosed families, a School Community Tool Kit and the distribution of community grants to local service providers.

Its government relations department, through its Autism Votes initiative, has played a critical role in securing federal legislation to advance the federal government's response to autism, and has successfully advocated for insurance reform to require insurers to cover medically-necessary autism therapies.

Each year, *Walk Now for Autism Speaks* fundraising events are held in more than 80 cities across North America, as well as Canada and the United Kingdom.

To learn more about Autism Speaks, please visit ***www.AutismSpeaks.org***.

AUTISM SPEAKS™
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www.AutismSpeaks.org

Credits

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NSSA
Nassau Suffolk Services for Autism
www.nssa.net

kiddsmiles
pediatric dentistry
www.kiddsmiles.com

Dental Form for Your Dentist Visit

MEDICAL INFORMATION

Patient Name:_____ Parent/Guardian:_____

Phone Number:_____ Parent/Guardian:_____

Describe the nature of your child's disability:

Are they currently taking any medications? YES NO
If yes, what medications:

Has your child ever had seizures? YES NO
If YES, date of last seizure:

Describe the type of seizure:

Do you have any allergies? YES NO
If yes, please list:

Does your child wear a hearing aid? YES NO
If YES, please explain:

Does your child have any other physical challenges that the dental team should be aware of?

ORAL CARE

Has your child visited the dentist before? YES NO
If yes, please describe:

Please describe your child's at-home dental care:

Does your child use a powered toothbrush or a manual toothbrush? YES NO

Does your child floss? YES NO

Does your child brush independently or with parent/guardian's assistance? YES NO

What are your dental health goals?

How often does your child snack during the day and on what types of foods?

COMMUNICATION & BEHAVIOR

Is your child able to communicate verbally? YES NO

Are there certain cues that might help the dental team?

Are there any useful phrases or words that work best with your child?

Does your child use non-verbal communication? YES NO

Please check any of the following that your child uses:

- O Mayer Johnson Symbols
- O Sign Language
- O Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- O Sentence Board or Gestures

Will you be bringing a communication system with you? YES NO

Are there any symbols/signs that we can have available to assist with communication?

BEHAVIOR/EMOTIONS

Are there any specific behavioral challenges that you would like the dental team to be aware of?

SENSORY ISSUES

Are there any sounds that your child is very sensitive to?

Does your child prefer the quiet? YES NO

Is your child more comfortable in a dimly lit room? YES NO

Is your child sensitive to motion and moving (i.e., the dental chair moving up and down or to a reclining position)?

Does your child have any specific oral sensitivities (gagging, gum sensitivities, etc.)?

Do certain tastes bother your child?

Is your child more comfortable in a clutter-free environment? YES NO

Please provide us with any additional information that may help us to prepare for a successful dental experience: