



# What is a Pediatric Dentist?

By Dr. Julia Richman DDS, Dino Kids Dentistry

When it is time to take your child to a dentist for the first time, you may be faced with a dilemma. Should you take your child to a family dentist, maybe your own dentist if he or she sees children, or to a specialist in pediatric dentistry?

There are some differences between family (general) dentists and pediatric dentists. All dentists attended dental school and have either a Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) or a Doctor of Medicine in Dentistry (DMD) degree, and a license to practice dentistry in their state.

Pediatric dentists have an additional 2-3 years in training in pediatric dentistry that includes advanced training in providing care to children with special health care needs, neurodevelopmental concerns such as autism, typical pediatric age-related behaviors, and dental fears and anxiety. They receive special training in providing dental care to infants, children, and adolescents, in orthodontics and hospital dentistry. They also receive training and experience in providing dental care to children with nitrous oxide (laughing gas), sedation and general anesthesia. Pediatric dentists usually restrict their practices to infants, children, and adolescents, but occasionally will provide care to adults with special health care needs.

Many, but not all, general dentists will see young children. However, some general dentists prefer young children to go to a specialist in pediatric dentistry until they are older.

*There are several things to consider when choosing a dental home for your child:*

- **Your child's age.** Very young children may benefit from the experience of a pediatric dentist. Pediatric dental offices are designed and equipped to provide care comfortably to young children.
- **Your child's dental needs.** Young children with extensive dental needs will be best treated by a pediatric dentist. Pediatric dentists are specifically trained in anesthesia. If your child requires

care with sedation or anesthesia and you choose to see a general dentist, make sure your child's dentist is qualified and experienced to provide this specialty level care.

- **Your preferences.** You may have a family dentist who provides excellent care for the whole family and want to remain with that dentist unless there is a need to refer your child to a specialist. Other families may feel more comfortable with their child receiving care from a pediatric dentist who can provide comprehensive primary and specialty level care.
- **Your dentist's preferences.** You may have an excellent dentist who prefers not to treat young children. Your dentist may feel comfortable with providing routine exams and dental cleanings but prefers to refer your child to a specialist for any other needed dental care.

Regardless of whether your child sees a general dentist or a pediatric dentist for routine care, it is critical to be aware of the training and experience of your child's dentist. If you are unsure if your child's dentist is a specialist, ASK! No reputable dentist will be offended by being asked about his or her credentials, and your child's dentist should be happy to provide you with information about his or her training and experience in providing dental care to children. In Washington state, the law states that "Qualifications of any licensed dentist must be made available to the public upon request."

At Dino Kid's Dentistry, we are committed to working in partnership with our wonderful general dentist colleagues. We welcome referrals from general dentists for specialty level care and appreciate being able to be of service to those families and their dentists. Please call us to learn more!

This article is for general information only and is not medical or dental advice. Please seek medical and dental care with you or your child's medical or dental provider for specific questions.

