

Ask Dr. Susan:

Q. Help! My 7-year-old son refuses to brush his teeth! I've resorted to bribery, and punishment (between "breath checks"). I really want him to develop good brushing habits and would love to stop being the "dental police". Do you have any suggestions?

A. We have found that, no matter what their age, patients don't follow orders or respond to shame. We're changing that paradigm. In a traditional prophylaxis model 70% of the time is spent "cleaning" teeth, 15% examining and lastly 15% ,only if time permits, "teaching and telling" patients what to do. We are working hard to turn this model upside down! We call our new approach the Child Self Prophylaxis and the goals are:

1. To help each child develop their *next* hygiene development skill.
2. To have each child graduate from high school with as few as possible dental restorations.
3. To have each child leave home at age 18 with the skills they need to maintain dental health for a lifetime.

Here's how it works! The first half of the appointment (because it's our first priority) is used to guide a child in choosing and using the right instruments for him or her. Each one chooses among a variety of dental care tools that they are eager to try (e.g. conventional toothbrush, spin brush, floss aids, proxybrushes, stimudents, etc.). We guide them in healthy technique development. It is a wonderful approach for self motivation. We also help them discover how their food/drink habits affect their dental health.

To quote one of our hygienists, Georgette, "Our hope is that the children become truly engaged in what might work best for them. We accept each patient at their current development level and help them find excitement in their next step. The parents are delighted with the personal health commitment of their children and the kids are proud to be so self-reliant."