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Bridging the gap

There are ways to take care of that gap in your teeth. *By Susan Maples*

Q. My son has inherited my small teeth and hates the gaps between his front teeth. He's seventeen and he wants help before his senior pictures. What are his options and how much might it cost?

A: The easiest and least expensive option is to ask the photographer to photoshop his smile. Okay, just kidding.

Let's explore three options:

Orthodontics: Moving teeth to close spaces is the most long lasting solution, as it requires no replacement restorations over his lifetime. The outcome might be less favorable in this case because small teeth will remain small teeth, even when the gaps are gone—they might look disproportionately narrow or short for his face. Orthodontics takes time and is moderately costly.

Composite Bonding: Tooth matching composite resin can extend and reshape small teeth in one visit. This is the least expensive and least invasive choice, as the natural teeth are usually un-altered. It can be accomplished in conjunction with tooth lightening (see before and after photo). While composite can be beautiful, it is, in my opinion, not as lustrous or long-lasting as porcelain. Composite is less durable for lengthening teeth than porcelain. The outcome is less predictable, as it depends on the individual dentists' artistic ability.

Porcelain Veneers: A veneer is a thin glass-like covering that is bonded onto the surface of each tooth. This procedure requires some enamel removal, and takes a few visits. Veneers can improve color, change tooth/smile shapes, and lengthen teeth, as desired. We control the predictability by building the smile design *three* times. Once in wax, as a 3-D blueprint, once in plastic as a trial (temporary) set, and after adjustment for speech and personal preferences, one final time in porcelain. The information from the trial veneers is captured as a precise guide to the final outcome. Veneers are longer lasting and more expensive than composites. Six anterior veneers might be about the same cost as a complete orthodontic solution.

To aid you in your decisions, ask your dentist if he might try a composite "mock up" or use photographic imaging to preview your son's new smile!

