



Rehearsal Guide

Dentist Visits

Preparing men and women with intellectual disability/autism (ID/A) to successfully complete a dental exam.

Introduction for Caregivers

A rehearsal guide contains realistic pictures, concrete ideas, and clear, brief instructions for guiding a person through what can be expected in a specific situation. It includes helpful suggestions for caregivers to follow to make the experience meaningful for the person and increase the likelihood of a successful outcome. This approach is beneficial when supporting people with intellectual disability/autism (ID/A) who are anxious about situations such as doctors' appointments, hospitalizations, and medical testing.

A rehearsal guide provides opportunities for the caregiver to assist the person to learn about a specific situation. It contains information on what is needed and why and explains exactly what can be expected. Such a guide is most effective when it is person-centered and used in conjunction with discussion to allow exploration of specific areas of concern. It can be a powerful tool when used as intended.

The expected result is that the person will then experience the situation in a way that supports health and well-being by being prepared and knowing what to expect. The guide can be used at all stages of the situation to facilitate a positive end result.

Thank you for taking the time to use this tool to work with self-advocates to improve their health outcomes.

How to Use This Rehearsal Guide

For best results, begin to review this rehearsal guide with the person prior to the day of the appointment. Sometimes it will help to review this material with an individual several days or weeks before an appointment; other times, it may be better to wait to review this material until just before the procedure is to take place, perhaps the day before or the morning of the procedure. Together with the individual, determine which will best suit the individual's needs and abilities in understanding the information provided; however, it is important not to wait until 5 minutes before a procedure to introduce this guide to an individual. Give the individual enough time in advance to become familiar with the procedure based on the pictures and information contained on each page and with the individual's abilities in mind.

It is best to review this guide slowly and to focus on one idea/page at a time, allowing the person to talk and/or ask questions after each idea/page is presented. A caregiver may want to share personal experiences related to having this procedure done but be sure to do so in a positive manner, depicting a positive outcome.

For Best Practices

- ✓ Allot time to review this material when the individual is alert and interested in doing so.
- ✓ Ensure that the setting is free from distraction. Based on the individual's attention span, it may be best to review one page at a time, rather than reviewing an entire guide in one sitting.
- ✓ Explain each picture and practice the suggested exercises with the individual, such as deep breathing, as they appear throughout the guide.
- ✓ On the day of the procedure, take this guide along to continue rehearsing the various steps involved in the procedure. Review each page step-by-step.
- ✓ Remain positive, calm, and upbeat.
- ✓ Remember to offer positive reinforcement throughout the procedure. If the procedure is not able to be completed, focus on positive aspects. If the individual seems upset, talk about it later when they are calm to find out how they felt and what could be changed or improved to have a better outcome the next time.

Introducing the Process

(Name of individual), you are going to *(name of dentist)* to have your teeth checked on *(date of test)*.

(Name of caregiver) will go with you and stay with you while you see the dentist.

It's important to have your teeth checked to make sure they are healthy. Having healthy teeth will keep you feeling good and help you to be able to eat.



Note to Caregiver: Caregivers might try contacting the dentist to obtain more information as needed. Questions to ask include: Is a caregiver permitted to stay with the individual during the exam?

Before the Appointment

Before you go to the dentist, it is important to brush and floss your teeth.

If the dentist told you to take any medication before your appointment, be sure to take it.



In the Waiting Room

When you first get to your appointment, you will have to wait until someone calls your name.

(Name of caregiver) will stay in the waiting room with you.

You might want to take a favorite book along to read, some of your favorite music to listen to on your headphones, or some other quiet activity to do while you wait.



When Your Name is Called

When your name is called, a person called a dental hygienist will take you to a small room.



A Big Chair to Sit in

This person will help you to sit in a big chair.

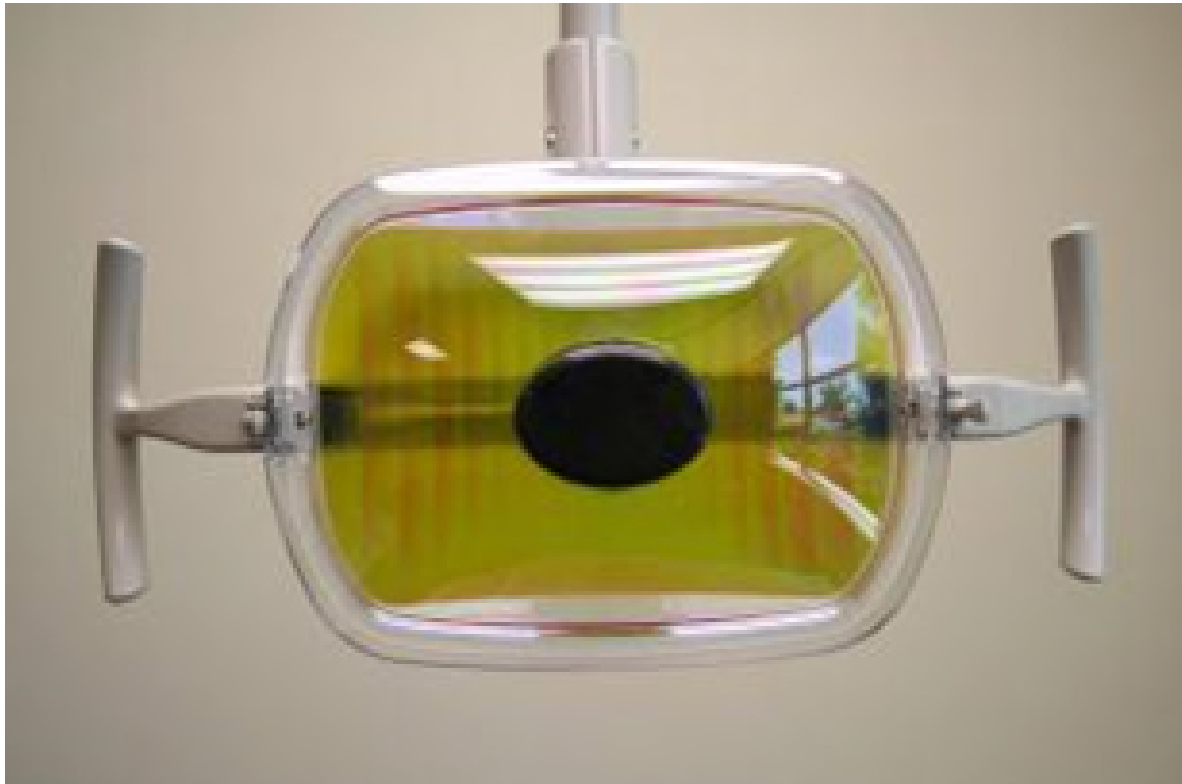
This chair is comfortable, and you will be able to lean back in it and put your feet up while your teeth are being checked.



A Bright Light

When you sit in the big chair, you will see a very bright light over your head.

This light helps the dentist see your teeth better.



Special Tools

When you sit in the big chair, you will also see different tools.

These are special tools used to clean and look at your teeth.



Putting on a Bib

The person helping you will put a small paper bib like this over the front of your shirt to keep it from getting wet.



Getting X-Rays

The dentist may need to see special pictures of your teeth; if so, you will have x-rays taken.

The person helping you will ask you to bite down on a small piece of plastic. Then they will take a picture of your teeth.

Don't talk while this is being done. It won't hurt at all.



Getting Your Teeth Cleaned

You are now ready to have your teeth cleaned.

The dental hygienist will work on your teeth with the special tools.

Remember not to talk while this is being done.

The tools may make some loud noises as your teeth are being cleaned.



Note to Caregiver: Caregivers may want to visit the dentist office prior to the visit to allow the individual to hear the sounds of all of the dental equipment prior to the scheduled visit.

Tools That Will Go in Your Mouth

The person helping you will use the special tools to look at and clean your teeth.



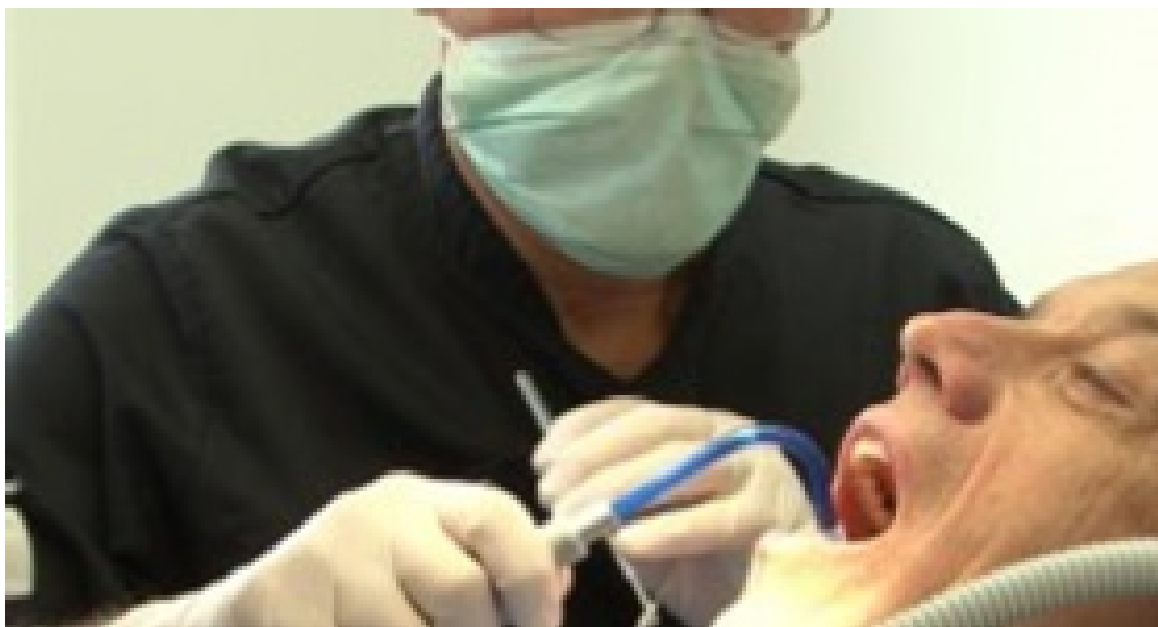
Time to Rinse

When the person is done cleaning your teeth, he or she will ask you to rinse your mouth with water and spit in the little sink beside your chair.



Time to Rinse

Some dentists do not have a sink to spit in after rinsing your teeth. The dental hygienist will use a plastic tube to gently suck the spit from your mouth. This doesn't hurt at all.



Meeting the Dentist

Now you will meet with the dentist.

The dentist may ask you questions about how your teeth feel. If you have any problems with your teeth, the dentist will be able to fix them.

Be sure to tell the dentist if any of your teeth hurt.



Note to Caregiver: Caregivers should allow person to respond to questions from the dentist but offer assistance or other necessary information, as needed, such as reports of pain or problems, or any changes in eating habits.

If You Have a Problem with Your Teeth

Sometimes when you have a problem with your teeth, you may need to get a small shot in your mouth.

The shot will only pinch a little.

After you get this shot, you won't feel any pain when the dentist fixes your teeth.

(Name of caregiver) will be there with you.



Relax and Take Some Deep Breaths

If you are nervous about getting a shot, try taking some deep breaths before the dentist gives you the shot.

The dentist will understand and (*Name of caregiver*) will be there to help you.



Note to Caregiver: At this point, practice some deep breathing with the person so they are prepared to do so during the exam if needed.

The Dentist Will Use Special Tools

The dentist will use the special tools to fix any problems with your teeth.

Remember not to talk while this is being done.



Fixing Your Teeth

You might feel the dentist pushing on your teeth, but you won't feel any pain.

You will also hear the noise from the special tools the dentist will use to fix your teeth.

(Name of caregiver) will be right there with you.

Remember not to talk while this is being done.



You're Almost Done

When the dentist is done, you might have to rinse your mouth with water and spit in the little sink beside your chair again.



You're Almost Done

If the dentist does not have a sink to spit in after rinsing your teeth, the dental hygienist will use a plastic tube to gently suck the spit from your mouth. This doesn't hurt at all.



Special Instructions

The dentist will talk to you about how to brush and floss your teeth every day.

Listen carefully to what the dentist says so you will be able to do these things for yourself at home.



You Can Do It!

There—that's how easy it is to go to the dentist!

Your mouth and teeth will feel great when you're done!

I know you can do it!

You always do a great job!



Note to Caregiver: Take time to see how well the person understands what was presented. Ask some very brief questions such as, "Do you know what will happen when you go to the dentist?"

Review the rehearsal guide as often as needed to ensure the person understands and is prepared when the day the dental appointment arrives.

Additional Resources

- Colgate-Palmolive Company. (2021). DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES. Retrieved on November 29, 2022, from <https://www.colgate.com/en-us/oral-health/conditions/developmental-disabilities>
- Oral Health Foundation. (n.d.). Dental care for people with special needs. Retrieved on November 29, 2022, from <https://www.dentalhealth.org/dental-care-for-people-with-special-needs>



For additional information regarding this guide or any of our physical or behavioral health trainings, contact:

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