

THE DEVELOPING MIND

The Boone Fetter Clinic: Diagnostic, Clinical and Research Center for Autism and Other Neurodevelopmental and Behavioral Disorders



Welcome

It is sometimes difficult to find a trustworthy source for answers to complex questions about your child's health and development, so we provide this newsletter to bring you up-to-date information from specialists and researchers at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, a proud member of the Autism Speaks Autism Treatment Network. For more information about the Boone Fetter Clinic, or if you have a question about your child's development, please call the Autism Warm Line at 323-361-6102.

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To make an appointment, call the Autism Warm Line at 323.361.6102, email BooneFetterClinic@chla.usc.edu or visit CHLA.org/AUTISM.

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Easing Clinic Visits for Kids With Autism



Larry Yin, MD
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Most children feel a little anxious about seeing a doctor. Some fear even temporary separation from their parent. Others worry about a painful shot, or just the unknown. Children with autism may have all these fears plus the additional challenges of sensory issues with a new environment. Just think of all the new smells, sounds, lights and faces a patient encounters in a medical clinic.

Anxiety that develops before a visit can boil over during the visit itself. In addition to creating great stress for the child, this can interfere with much-needed evaluations and medical procedures. In the worst case, appointments may have to be rescheduled—a hardship for both the child and his or her family.

At the Boone Fetter Clinic, we've developed a number of strategies to help ease visits for children with autism spectrum disorder and their families. I hope that these tips will help ease your child's next medical visit and lead to more effective communication between you and your child's provider.

Scheduling your appointment

Whenever possible, ask for the first appointment of the day or the first appointment after lunch. This can reduce the sometimes-unavoidable wait times that build up through the day. Ask clinic staff to fax or email you any forms that need to be filled out before you see the doctor. You can also send ahead any forms you need filled out—for example, school forms.

Preparing for the visit

- Develop a social story to prepare your child for the visit. Social stories—visual stories that walk the reader through particular situations—are an excellent way to help explain new situations to kids and adults on the autism spectrum.

Develop social skills through social stories!
Learn more at <https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/personalized-stories>

- Role-playing is another great way to ease anxiety, such as a make-believe visit to the doctor's office.

- Create a visual schedule for the day, using a picture to describe each step of the visit.
- Is this going to be your child's first time at a new office? Consider a brief visit beforehand just to allow your child to meet and say hello to the front office staff and see the play area in the waiting room.
- Practice calming exercises and activities during periods of stress.
- Consider emailing any questions you have for the doctor ahead of time. Print out a copy to bring them with you as well.

Things to bring

- Video of any new behaviors of concern to you (consider capturing these on your cell phone or other video recording device)
- A written list of any medications and nutritional supplements that your child is taking
- A list of your child's health care providers and their contact information



During the visit

- Bring comfort items or activities that might help redirect your child from his or her fears.
- Use the relaxation techniques you practiced beforehand.
- If possible, consider bringing another adult to help during the visit—someone who can either help comfort your child or help you record the answers to your questions.

- Remember to share lists of medications/supplements and health care providers with your doctor.

After the visit

- Praise, praise, praise your child for his or her successes during the visit.
- Review the answers to your questions.

Remember, you know your child best. We hope you'll adapt these strategies to help make your child's health care visits successful.

This article first appeared on the Autism Speaks Blog at <https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog>.

Research Highlight: The Sensory-Smart Dental Office Transforms Dentist Visits



For a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), visiting the dentist can be quite an ordeal. The bright lights, loud noises, tastes and smells of toothpaste and other oral care products, and being touched by other people can create an unwelcoming environment that increases a child's anxiety and stress level. This makes visiting the dentist a real challenge for families and can lead to poor oral health for some children.

A group of clinicians and researchers at Children's Hospital Los Angeles and the University of Southern California (USC) have teamed up on a research project to

make dental environments more calming for children with ASD, as well as other anxious children. The project is led by José Polido, DDS, head of dentistry at CHLA, and Sharon Cermak, EdD, professor at the Mrs. T.H. Chan Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy at USC.

The research team transformed the dental environment by projecting slow-moving visual effects onto the ceiling, turning off overhead office lights and headlamps, and playing soothing music. Also, instead of using traditional tools to secure the child in the dental chair, practitioners used a seat cover that looks like a butterfly with its wings wrapped around the child, which provides a comforting, deep-pressure hug.

To test this sensory-smart environment, 44 CHLA patients—22 with autism and 22 children not on the autism spectrum—underwent two professional dental cleanings. One cleaning took place in a regular dental environment, while the other took place in the sensory-smart dental environment. During each session, the child's physiological anxiety, behavioral distress and pain intensity were measured. Researchers found that children with

ASD demonstrated significantly more uncooperative behaviors during routine dental cleanings compared to typically developing children; and also showed significantly greater physiological stress. Both autistic and typically developing children showed decreased psychological anxiety and reported lower pain and sensory discomfort in the sensory-smart dental environment.

Funded by the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR), this research was published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, and led to the publication of five additional papers focused on the sensory-smart dental environment. The team recently received additional funding from the NIDCR to conduct a long-term study. Their goal is to examine the effects of the sensory-smart dental environment in a larger number of children and develop protocols to adapt other dental clinics, while ensuring that these new dental environments do not produce additional financial burdens on patients and their families.

For more information, please call the Division of Dentistry at 323-361-4131.



Transition Tool Kit From Autism Speaks:

The future can seem uncertain for a young adult with autism, and overwhelming to

parents thinking about ways to help their child transition to a more independent life. Autism Speaks recently announced the launch of Version 2.0 of its popular Transition Tool Kit, which serves as a guide to families on the journey from adolescence to adulthood.

The guiding principle of the tool kit is that all individuals with autism, regardless of the level of support needed, should be able to live a life filled with purpose, dignity, choices and happiness. The tool kit provides parents with suggestions and options to consider as they set out to find their child's own unique path to adulthood.

The Transition Tool Kit can be found at www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/transition-tool-kit



Stress Reduction for Moms:

Mothers of children with autism, are you looking for ways to de-stress and feel good about yourself?

The Mindful Moms Stress Reduction Course is a free program offered by California State University, Northridge in the San Fernando Valley. The program uses breathing and relaxation exercises to reduce stress and increase general health and well-being for mothers of children with autism.

For more information, contact mindfulmoms@csun.edu or 818-677- 2598.



Get Involved:

The Autism Parent Advisory Board is looking for new members!

- Are you a caregiver or family member of a child with autism spectrum disorder?
- Has your child received services at CHLA or any of its satellite clinics?
- Do you want to contribute to improving autism-related services at CHLA?

If so, contact us for more information. We want your input on community education, outreach and CHLA research efforts.

For questions, contact **Grace Anaya** at granaya@chla.usc.edu or 323-361-8444.

To join, go to <http://j.mp/APAB01>