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.

1300 N. Vermont Ave., Suite 905, Los Angeles, CA 90027
Easing Clinic Visits for Kids With Autism

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

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

• 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

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

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.

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) 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.

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

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

Anxiety that develops before a visit can build 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.
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

Autism Warm Phone Line:
323.361.6102

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