

## **PREVENTION, PREVENTION, PREVENTION!**

**Sarah Bradbury, Denplan's Marketing Communications and Brand Manager, discusses how you can get effective prevention messages across to children while building rapport with their parents, schools and your local media.**

Kids, as a general rule, are always keen to learn and understand new things and this includes how their bodies work. Therefore it can be easier to get across prevention messages to children and to teach them more about their teeth, gums and oral health. However, for many children going to the dentist can be a daunting experience, so what can you do to help?

The tips below can give you ideas on how to not only educate children on how to take better care of their oral health, but also help you raise the profile of your practice, build relationships with patients and even recruit new ones.

### **Relaxing child patients**

It is vitally important that dentists inform parents of what is going to happen during their child's appointment, as it is usually them that will explain this to the child. You could also allow parents and children to have their appointments at the same time. If a child can see their parent having their check-up and that there is nothing to fear, they are more likely to be 'grown-up' and more calm and relaxed as a result.

One of the most important things to avoid is talking over the child, directly to their parent. This only makes the child feel excluded and can often increase their anxiety. Children not only like to feel involved and special but they also love to learn and see new things. A great way of doing this, depending on their age, is to show them their x-rays and to explain any procedures. Some practices also find it useful to have information leaflets for parents about bringing their children into the practice and what to expect.

## Education

A fantastic way of getting the message of prevention across to your child patients is by holding an open day. An event of this kind will not only provide a way to introduce yourself to parents and children in a relaxed and friendly environment, but will also give you something really newsworthy to contact your local press with.

Thinking of the messages you want to get across to kids, however, can be difficult. Educational dental initiatives, developed specifically for children, are a great way of teaching younger patients about their mouths in a fun and easily absorbed way.

The Denplan Preventers: Commander Clean, Floss Girl and Brush Man, are cartoon characters which help to build relationships between children and the dental team, and are a great place to start. Using these characters, Denplan have produced Educational Activity Booklets in-line with the science National Curriculum. These booklets are in the form of comics, and the hero, Sam, meets the Preventers throughout the course of his school day. They teach him the dangers of sugary foods, and the reasons why he should take extra care of his teeth and gums, in an easily absorbed and fun way.

The science National Curriculum is a defined structure that teachers use to ensure that children achieve the required learning outcomes at each age group or Key Stage. The three Activity Booklets are split into the defined age groups 5-7 (Key Stage 1); 8-11 (Key Stage 2) and 12-14 (Key Stage 3). The exercises for each age-group grow with complexity to ensure the children achieve the desired learning outcomes. Topics include issues such as how much toothpaste to use, when and how to brush teeth, understanding the importance of a healthy diet and identifying foods that form a healthy diet while also being good for the teeth. Denplan are unique in providing this service to teachers via Denplan member dentists.

## **Preventers in practice**

Jason Hopkins, a dentist in Cheshire, who has been using the Denplan Preventers in a really interesting way, commented:

“I want to get across to children that teeth are for life and to help them maintain their teeth by keeping up good habits from day one. To do this, we've recently been doing a number of educational themed days specifically for children, on topics such as tooth brushing and dietary information.

“The Denplan Preventers are a great way of getting these messages across, as the Educational Activity Booklets are not only in-line with the science National Curriculum, but they are also designed to transfer information to different age groups and get the message of prevention over in a fun and interesting way.

“Many of the team here have children of their own and can really see how useful these tools are at getting the message of prevention across to children. I am really hoping to continue with the themed events in the future as they have been so successful and The Denplan Preventers have been instrumental in their success.”

## **Organisation**

If you want to go ahead and start organising an open day, or any event aimed at children, you need to firstly decide what you would like to achieve. Some practices prefer to use open days to simply get better acquainted with children and their parents, and to show young patients that the dentist's is a fun place to be. Why not try providing entertaining activities such as face painting? You could also use the opportunity to educate children on how to brush their teeth correctly and tell them what food and drink they should avoid.

Other practices like to use their open days to give their young patients a check-up in a more child-friendly atmosphere. This is an excellent way of seeing children in one block while limiting the disruption to your practice, encouraging more regular check-ups and reducing the fear factor for children who may perceive the experience as 'scary'. And, by also inviting key members of the press, you are more likely to receive coverage in your local newspaper.

Some dental organisations may even provide child-friendly merchandise for practices to help them with their open days. Denplan provide balloons to help decorate your practice, as well as stickers, fuzzy bugs and colouring pencils to give away to children.

### **School visits**

If you already have a great relationship with the child patients at your practice, why not try organising something a little more demanding? A visit to your local school can be the ideal challenge and, in reality, it couldn't be easier.

By simply contacting the Head of the school or science department, and explaining the key points you want to get across, you can not only get your messages over to pupils, but you can also help the school. If you need more guidance in planning the content of your talk, the Denplan Preventers Educational Children's Activity Booklets can also provide you with an idea of the most appropriate topics for children of each age group as they are linked to the science National Curriculum and so will help teachers fulfil a required aspect of their pupils' education.

By providing education and advice in a friendly, approachable way, both children and their parents will become aware of you, which is often half the battle in attracting new patients. The local media will also be interested in hearing about your school visit, so don't forget to ask permission from the school if you plan to issue a press release.

Patients are far more likely to stay loyal to your practice and attend regular check-ups if they know that their children are well looked after and might even be more inclined to buy additional products or services from you. Offering great care for children is a powerful way of making your practice stand out from competitors' and could even attract new patients, as a word-of-mouth recommendation carries much more weight than any advert could. Using these tips, you and your team can start getting back to the days where patients stayed loyal to their surgery from birth until old-age.

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## About the Author

### **Sarah Bradbury: Marketing Communications & Brand Manager**

Sarah has worked in service marketing for 16 years and in the dental industry for more than ten. She started at the BDA, recruiting students, and worked with VDPs until becoming Dental Protection's Marketing Manager. Sarah has been with Denplan for over three years.