

New self-help guide for kids could stop fear of the dentist

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Credit: University of Sheffield

The number of children with phobias of the dentist could be reduced as experts create the first self-help guide designed to encourage young children to face their fears.

Led by academics at the University of Sheffield, the guide uses Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques to reduce [children's](#) anxiety about going to the dentist.

Over a third of children experience fear of visiting the dentist. This fear can prevent children having regular check-ups and completing vital dental treatment.

The team found that 60 per cent of children felt a lot less worried about visiting the dentist after using the guide, which is available in a paper version or online and includes a range of effective techniques. Designed with children to help them work with their dentist. It uses 'tools' such as writing a message to the dentist, squeezing a stress ball and choosing their own small reward.

Dr Zoe Marshman from the University's School of Clinical Dentistry said: "Children who are scared of

the dentist often end up with poor dental health and stay scared of the [dentist](#) for the rest of their lives.

"At the moment, most of these children end up having sedation or being given a general anaesthetic for their dental treatment. This can be a traumatic experience for children and their parents as well as incurring high costs for the NHS."

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) funded the project and the team worked with 48 children and their families at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and a community dental clinic in Derbyshire.

Dr Marshman added: "The guide was designed with children to give them choice and control to challenge commonly held unhelpful thoughts and provide information on dental procedures."

The team plan to further trial the guide to determine the cost-effectiveness compared to normal treatments.

More information: J. Porritt et al. Development and Testing of a Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Resource for Childrens Dental Anxiety, *JDR Clinical & Translational Research* (2016). [DOI: 10.1177/2380084416673798](https://doi.org/10.1177/2380084416673798)

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