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An Exploration of Children's Dental Anxiety: Triggers, Coping and Needs

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Abstract

Visiting the dentist can induce feelings of intense anxiety in many people. Such people often seek to limit their anxiety by avoiding dental treatment. Avoidance can then lead to major dental problems that require invasive and possibly painful treatment and reinforcing the individual's dental fear. Very few studies have been conducted into children's experience of the dental visit in their own words. The aim of the present study was to do this by exploring three aspects of the dental experience. These were the factors in the dental environment that trigger dental anxiety, the coping strategies children use to deal with dental anxiety, and what children's needs are that would enable them to cope better. Interviews were conducted with 54 children aged between 7-11 years. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the children's accounts. The findings revealed that a number of factors trigger anxiety in children; children use a wide range of coping strategies to deal with anxiety and pain while at the dentist and there are a number of needs children have during dental treatment that are not being met. Implications for these themes for dental training, education and interventions are suggested.

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