

# YOUNG AT HEART: MAKING YOUR OFFICE KID-FRIENDLY

Tips and tricks to make your office kid and teen-friendly.

Just like any patient group, kids and teens have their own specific needs. For very young kids, this may be their first time having their eyes examined, so there are fears and worries. For older kids, there may be apprehension at having to wear glasses. And for teens — well, honestly what isn't troubling them at that age?

With optometrists and their staff already needing to meet the needs of their adult clientele, there's no wonder not every optometric office caters to the younger set. However, it may not be as intimidating as it seems to add kids and teens to your practice. In fact, Dr. Corey Hodes of the Los Angeles County Optometric Society says there's nothing to be afraid of.

"As long as you can relate to them and make them feel comfortable, it's just like examining an adult," explains Dr. Hodes, who owns Hodes Vision Optometry in Los Angeles. "There's a few extra tests you're going to do that you wouldn't necessarily (do) with an adult, but it's more about making the (child) feel comfortable, coming down to their level and being able to relate to them...It's more about communication than the actual exam."

In order to better communicate with his younger patients, Dr. Hodes makes it a point to keep up-to-date. "(I'm able to) talk to them about the current events in their world in terms of video games, cartoons and things like that — just try to stay on top of all of that so I can relate to them when they come in," he adds.

## First Impressions

Making younger patients feel at ease and showing you can relate to them starts when they first walk in your office. At San Ramon Family Optometry, PC, Alameda Contra Costa Counties Optometric Society member Dr. Beverly Smith constructed a larger waiting area to accommodate a separate area just for kids — full of primary colors, book bins, toys, a Lego® table and more. The waiting area also offers free Wi-Fi for those doing homework. "When kids come into the office, they make a beeline for that area immediately and feel welcome at our office," she adds.

Dr. David Bloch of the San Diego County Optometric Society offers something similar at Bloch Vision Care and Children's Optometric of North County in Carlsbad. "There is a special waiting area for kids equipped with toys, drawing boards and videos to keep them entertained while they are waiting to be seen and their parents are filling out paperwork," he details.

When designing a space for kids, Dr. Smith suggests ODs take a field trip for inspiration. "Visit a preschool or kindergarten class and see what kinds of books or puzzles, design themes, wall colors, or toys to purchase," she explains. "Make the kids' area cheerful, relaxed and inviting — make it obvious that it's a space devoted to them."

Having a staff that is trained to handle young patients is also important. "My main assistant has a 6-year-old, so she's already good with kids," says Dr. Hodes. "So when kids come in, (I make) sure she's really attentive to making sure they're comfortable."

"Our staff is taught to treat all patients, regardless of age, with respect and as individuals," Dr. Smith adds. "This includes addressing the young patient by name and talking directly to them during testing, explaining all the tests, being sensitive to their questions, and being patient."



## Feature Article

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## The Exam

Properly trained staff can also help put a young patient's mind at ease so they're hopefully not a bundle of nerves when it's their turn to sit in the exam chair. Even then, kids may need some reassurance from the doctor before the exam can begin. "Many young people come in tired from school, anxious or scared of doctors, sleepy, or may not want to be there," Dr. Smith explains. "You should spend a few minutes talking to them and trying to get a sense of how they are doing. You will be able to adapt your exam pace and procedures better and get better results."



Dr. Corey Hodes of the Los Angeles County Optometric Society during an exam with a young patient.

"I try to make their experience at my office fun and entertaining," Dr. Bloch adds. "I will greet them with big clown glasses on, will pretend they are here for something else like a haircut, do magic tricks during parts of their exam, and joke with them about their excellent eye abilities. I try to put them at ease by having conversations unrelated to their eyes until it is necessary. Seriousness is left for discussions with the parents and final explanations of problems."

During the exam, Dr. Smith does what she can to make her younger patients comfortable. "We use different types of hand or finger puppets for fixation targets and give them to the patients during the exam to keep," she says. "We always have booster seats and stools nearby. We have several kids' books, kids' color vision plates, stereo tests, and acuity charts. We always have a supply of kids-size post mydratics."

To help prepare kids — and parents — for the exam, Dr. Hodes sends parents home with a copy of a picture-based visual acuity chart before the exam so the child can familiarize themselves with the symbols. Additionally, Dr. Hodes has produced a small booklet to help educate parents about kids' eye exams, with tips on purchasing kids' frames and what to expect at an eye exam.

However, even the best prep can sometimes fail with a child who won't stop moving or playing with expensive equipment they should not be touching. For this, Dr. Hodes has a solution. "We have a teddy bear in the exam room (and) if I see that a kid is fidgety, I'll hand them the teddy bear and it will be his 'assistant' during the eye exam," he explains. "They have to

take good care of the teddy bear and it keeps their hands off your equipment."

And the promise of a treat after the exam can also be helpful. Dr. Smith has a special prize box for young patients to receive a reward from after their exam. "Many tell us they love to come for their annual exams because of what they got from the prize box the year before," she adds.

## Frame It

While keeping little hands off expensive equipment is a good idea, ODs should encourage young patients to be hands-on in the dispensary. According to Gloria Nicola, senior features editor for *20/20 Magazine*, offices are making their frames displays more kid-friendly. "I've noticed some places where they actually have the shelving lower so (kids) can touch and see (the frames), which I think is important," she explains. "It's important to have a lot of mirrors around so they can see how they look. Smaller furniture and things that appeal to children is important."

At Dr. Smith's practice, there is a frame board for young kids and a separate one for teens and tweens (ages nine to 13). "The boards are designed so that the kids know exactly where 'their frames' are," she explains. "There are both ophthalmic and sunglass frames for kids. Mirrors and frames are positioned lower on the boards so the kids can reach for them and browse. I think they have more fun browsing and trying on frames themselves."

When designing his office, Dr. Hodes made it a point to have a specific section for kids' frames and keep it well stocked. "The turn-around on the kids' glasses may sit there longer, but I need to have a big selection of kids' (frames) because it shows prospective parents that we carry kids' glasses and we're kid-friendly," he says. He suggests carrying brands that kids will recognize, such as Barbie™, Converse®, Nike™ and Juicy Couture® for Kids, and anything that will catch their eye in terms of fashion.

However, Dr. Hodes says many times the younger set will take cues from what their parents are wearing and will want to emulate the style Mom is wearing or brand Dad is wearing. He says a lot of brands, like Ray-Ban® and Converse, are making miniature versions of their popular adult frames for kids. "Glasses now are so stylish and fun — it's different from the older days when kids didn't want to wear glasses (because) they were so sterile and not fashion-oriented," Dr. Hodes says. "Now there are so many different brands out there that have gotten into the adult business and now they're making kids' glasses."

Nicola agrees, "Kids' eyewear is not really trendy — it follows the adult market pretty closely. The only thing it may be trendier in is colors, but other than that it's pretty conservative because kids want what everyone else is wearing. They don't really want to be that different."



## FRAME IT — EYEWEAR TRENDS FOR KIDS & TEENS

Kids' eyewear is a booming business. According to 20/20 Magazine's Kid's Eyewear MarketPulse Survey 2009 — a survey of 224 independent optical retailers who sell to children and other age groups — children from infancy to 14 years old represented 20% of their customer base in 2009, and children's eyewear and related products accounted for 15% of total gross dollar sales.

With the back-to-school rush around the corner, what can optometrists do to ensure their selection of kids' and teens' frames are what picky younger patients are looking for? CO spoke with 20/20 Magazine Senior Features Editor Gloria Nicola to get the top trends.

**Plastic Frames** — Although metal frames have always been popular in children's frames as they are easy to adjust, Nicola says plastic is beginning to give metal a run for its money. "Because of the trend towards plastic that is so strong in the adult market, it's beginning to filter down slowly into the kids' market," she says.

**Rich Color** — While parents may want durability in frames, kids want color. "A few years ago kids' eyewear started to get very dull in colors, but recently it's become much more

colorful," Nicola says. But don't mistake "colorful" for neon green. Nicola says the popular colors are rich shades of blues and purples, as well as pink.

**Conservative Shape** — Frame shapes tend to stay rectangular — which Nicola says is the shape currently dominating the general market — and oval. "There are a few round ones and occasionally a little cat's eye, but mostly it's pretty conservative," she adds.

**Teens** — When it comes to teens, Nicola says they want what the adults are wearing. "The colors that are popular in the adult market they would be interested in — I don't think they want anything that stands out too much," she says.

**Tweens** — Nicola says they are seeing an increase in collections targeted to the tween market, which serves ages nine to 13, which people believe is a much underserved market. "They don't want the stuff the little kids wear, but they need smaller sizes so they can't really wear the adult sizes," she explains. This also includes having an area for tweens in the optical. "It's important to have a certain area that isn't just full of stuffed toys because that will turn off the older kids," she adds.

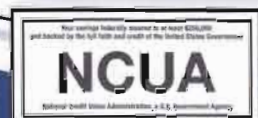
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