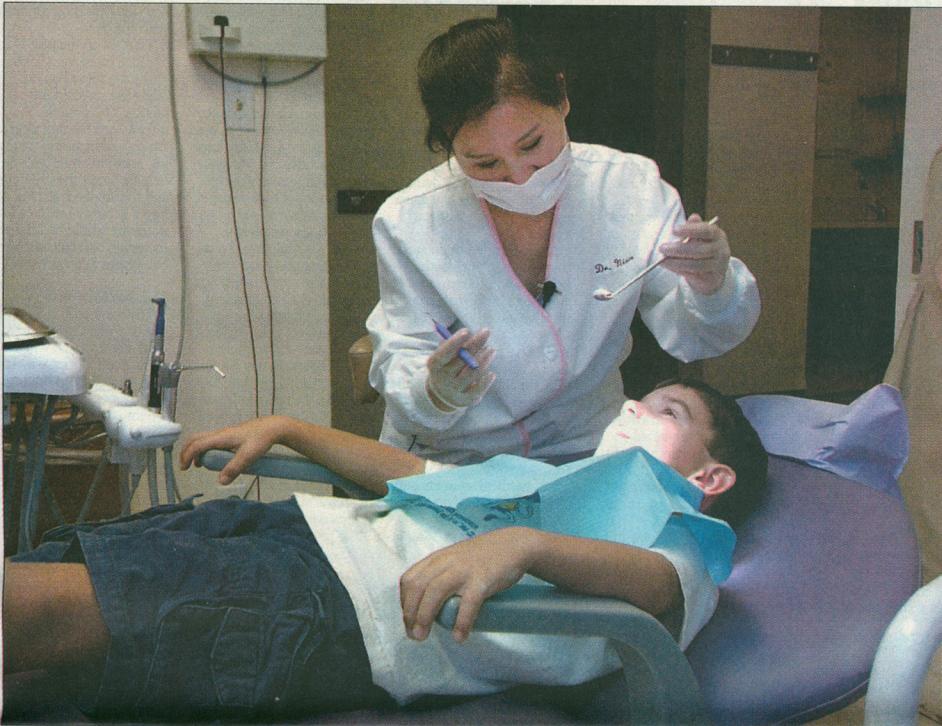




# Keep your child Smiling



**Top left:** Dental assistant Dee Martinho of Tipton demonstrates how she teaches children to brush their teeth: She uses a special puppet with human-looking teeth.  
**Above:** Dentist Yen Nisco examines 6-year-old Kasey Clements' teeth at Visalia Dental Group.

## First visit to the dentist doesn't have to be traumatic

By Nick McClellan  
Staff writer

In a world of sugary treats, every child needs a dentist. But overcoming children's fears can be a serious obstacle for parents and professionals.

"It's a very different appointment than, let's say, seeing your medical doctor," said Dr. Jessy Malli, a Tulare dentist. "We deal with very intimate space."

Malli, who took over his practice from his parents, works with children constantly. Their dental-chair behavior runs the gamut from angel to fearful, he said.

Parents can do much to assuage a child's pre-exam fears, he said. An important task: Diffusing any negative perceptions about the dentist.

But once a child makes it into the chair, it's up to the dentist and staff members to provide comfort. Dee Martinho, a registered dental assistant in Malli's office, is the first to see young patients. "I practically stand on my head to get the kids relaxed," she said.

Malli and Malli employ a "tell, show, do" strategy. Before beginning an examination, they explain what they're going to do, then demonstrate it by, for example, spraying water on a hand.

A lightened-up vocabulary also eases tensions in the chair, Malli said.

"Instead of a 'drill,' it's a 'water gun,'" Malli said. "[Or] you can tell them you're going to blast all the sugar bugs away."

Mallino also has two puppet "assistants"



Dr. Jessy Malli operates Tulare Family Dentistry in Tulare.

with replica human teeth that help with dental care demonstrations.

Dr. Yen Nisco, dentist with the Visalia Dental

### VIDEO ONLINE

Is your child unconvinced the dentist is a friend? Watching an actual exam online may help alleviate some of the child's fears. See it at [www.VisaliaTimesDelta.com/Video](http://www.VisaliaTimesDelta.com/Video).



### ON THE NET

[www.aapd.org](http://www.aapd.org) — American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. Information for parents on taking their children to the dentist for the first time.

Group, has been 6-year-old Kasey Clements' dentist for two years. On a recent visit, Kasey was examined by Nisco and got a fluoride treatment and X-rays from her assistant.

"He's doing an excellent job for me," said Nisco, who works with many children in her practice.

Kasey's mother, Wendy Clements, tried to take her older daughter, Emilee, to a general-practice dentist. But the results left something to be desired.

"[Emilee] didn't even open her mouth for him," she said. "He just didn't work well with kids."

She switched to Nisco, who's listed as a pediatric dentist in the phone book. Emilee hasn't

See DENTIST, 2C

### TIPS BEFORE KIDS HIT THE CHAIR

- A child's first visit to the dentist should occur between the ages of 6 months and 1 year.
- Bottles and pacifiers should not be left in a child's mouth, because they allow sugars to damage the teeth.
- Fluoridated toothpaste should not be used

until about age 3. Before using toothpaste, parents can use a clean cotton swap to clean teeth as necessary.

► Paint the dentist in a positive light. Saying to kids, "You'll get a shot," will make the visit more difficult than it has to be.

- Consult your dentist early if problems with your child's teeth arise, at any age. Early action can prevent rampant cavities.

Sources: Dr. Yen Nisco, Visalia dentist; Dr. Jessy Malli, Tulare dentist

## Dentist

Continued from page 1C

had any trouble since.

Nisco allows parents in the exam room.

They can hold the child's hand if necessary.

Most first visits are visual examinations only, Nisco said. Especially cooperative children may get an X-ray.

Cleanings can take place once trust has been estab-

lished.

"It was like brushing your teeth for like a long time," Kasey said of his cleaning.

His advice to other children in the chair?

"Don't be afraid," Kasey said.

But no matter what you say to some kids, the dentist is tantamount to the boogeyman. Malli said he'll schedule another appointment if necessary, or refer the child to a specialist.

Sedation is an option when work is needed. Another ex-

treme measure: the "papoose board," which immobilizes a wiggling child so the dentist and assistant can work.

"You cannot work on a moving target," Martinho said.

Crying targets can be dealt with, however.

"[One day] I think I had eight patients [and] all of them cried," Martinho said. "That wore me out, but still we did it."

► The reporter can be reached at [nmczell@visalia.com](mailto:nmczell@visalia.com).