

BASCD 2023 ABSTRACT #21**Autistic children and young people's key messages
for improving dental care experiences**

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Background:

Autistic children and young people (ACYP) can face a range of challenges when attending the dentist related to sensory sensitivities, communication differences and difficulties with social interaction. Little research includes ACYPs' own views on their dental experience and how it might be improved.

Objectives:

To explore ACYP's experiences of going to the dentist and how it could be improved.

Methods:

CYP aged 5-19 years old, with a diagnosis of autism/on the autism pathway and at school/college/work/living in Plymouth were eligible to participate. ACYP were recruited through schools and autism support organisations. The aim was to recruit twenty ACYP. Audio-recorded interviews were conducted on-line or face-to-face. ACYP were asked to share their experiences of attending the dentist and key messages for dental students on how best to care for ACYP. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. The Faculty of Health Research Ethics and Integrity Committee, University of Plymouth gave ethical approval.

Results:

Nineteen ACYP (aged 5-18 years, 7 female) were interviewed. Themes included experiences of dental care, barriers to attending dental care and the needs of ACYP in the dental environment. Key messages centred on autism knowledge/awareness, the need for dental care professionals (DCPs) to understand how autism can differ in presentation and DCP's willingness/ability to adapt practice to individual needs. ACYP emphasised the need for DCPs to create a positive atmosphere, communicate clearly, give time for processing, explain procedures and ask permission.

Conclusion:

The findings highlight factors which impact ACYP's experience of dental care and provide a valuable insight into how ACYP perceive their dental care and what they recognise as key factors in good care. Listening to the voices of ACYP provides an opportunity for DCPs to consider and respond to their needs and to further the goal of providing a truly inclusive dental service.

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