California, MD - Your oral health is a key component to your overall health. Whether you’re one or 100, oral health should not be taken for granted.

The sooner children begin regular dental checkups, the healthier their mouths will stay throughout their lives. But getting children to cooperate at the dentist is a different story. It’s a new place, with strange people and weird tools and noises. Let’s face it, the dentist can be a scary place for kids.

That’s where Smile Castle Pediatric Dentistry steps in. The new pediatric dentist opened in California in July. Dr. Eun Sun Hwang is the owner. She comes with quite the list of credentials, including specialty training in Pediatric Dentistry.

“What we really want to do is educate parents and children and motivate them because dental decay is so common.” Hwang explained. Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease among children in the United States. “By the time kids go to kindergarten, forty percent of children will have a cavity.” Hwang stated.

Hwang strives to form a relationship with her patients and their family. Hwang said, “Not every child gets treated the same. We treat the entire family. We try to form a relationship with the family. It’s not just about treating the teeth, it’s about treating the whole child.”

Hwang says children should start seeing a dentist around their first birthday or six months after their first tooth comes in. She assured me crying children won’t scare her away: “If they cry, it doesn’t bother me. That’s their normal behavior. My entire staff and I enjoy working with children.” Hwang said she encourages parents to be with their children during the exam and treatments and even has a special chair for mom or dad.

The team at Smile Castle has a special set-up for children under the age of two, “We do not expect them to sit in the dental chair.” Hwang said. They have mom (or dad) sit in a chair and have their child straddle them. Hwang then puts her knees against the parent’s and they have a “boogie board” for the child to lay on. The idea behind this, is for the child to always have eye contact with their parent.

For older children who are still a bit apprehensive about the dentist, Hwang said bribery can go a long way. “We give stickers and prizes. We also give them their own toothbrushes and ask them to brush because children like doing it themselves.”

Once the exam is complete, Hwang provides the family with a special oral health report card. “It spells out what to do like brush twice a day, floss once a day and what types of food and drinks to avoid.”

Hwang admits not every child is going to cooperate, “Some children might be fine after one or two visits, and some might need four or five.” She said it’s all about making kids comfortable. “We work on building the trust first. We want the child to have a good experience.”

Some children will need more extensive work like fillings, crowns and extractions. For more extreme work, it might require being done in the hospital with general anesthesia. Nitrous oxide is available in the office and Hwang is working to provide oral sedation in the office, which offers a little more sedation than just the nitrous. 

Hwang said one of her biggest goals behind her practice is to be accessible, that’s why she’s a participating provider of the Maryland Healthy Smile. It works like Medicaid for children and it allows underprivileged children the opportunity to receive necessary dental care. Smile Castle also accepts 16 different types of insurances. “It might be more expensive for us and more paperwork, but that doesn’t matter. I want to be available to all children,” Hwang said proudly.

Hwang wants parents and children to know, oral health can affect the entire body. “Your mouth is a portal to the rest of your body. It’s important to keep it healthy,” Hwang explained.

The Smile Castle is located at 23076 Three Notch Rd. #203 and is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Contact Joy Shrum at j.shrum@thebaynet.com