

Children's rights and dental care treatment

Luigi Paglia
Editor in chief
European Journal of Paediatric Dentistry

DOI: 10.23804/ejpd.2024.25.01.01

editorial

Dentists, especially paediatric dentists, should inform their young patients of the treatment to be undertaken in an appropriate and comprehensive manner. In 1989, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - UNCRC - https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text) was adopted, comprising of 54 articles concerning every aspect of a child's life, notably health, including oral health. More than 30 years after the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, both health professionals and parents still struggle to grasp this subject, resulting in its scarce application in daily practice.

Children's rights have also been mentioned several times in medical and dental literature, reminding health professionals that the approach to young patients must be age-appropriate. The clinician must learn to consider children as the main protagonists in the choices concerning their health, and they must be aware of their rights from an early age. Particularly in the field of dentistry, it is a matter of guaranteeing the best dental care for every child with particular attention to the indigent or disabled (Article 23).

In addition to this, the most effective and up-to-date treatment must be proposed, avoiding unnecessary extractions and favouring conservative therapy that can guarantee a better quality of life in the future, while reducing treatment under general anaesthesia. In current practice, consent to treatment is often demanded from the parents, without involving the child. However, every child has the right to freely express their opinion and be actively involved in any matter that concerns them.

This opinion is expressed in different ways according to age and stage of maturity. Pictures, drawings, cartoons and videos can help the healthcare provider when explaining procedures to the young patient, thus allowing them to obtain consent and cooperation. In individual countries, it would be advisable to have guidelines that facilitate the child's active consent to health treatments. So, what happens in your country?

Read the Convention on the Rights of the Child here: