



A B O U T F A C E

Treating People With Facial Differences

Created by AboutFace for the dental community

As a society, our first impressions are often shaped by physical appearance. People who live with facial differences experience that firsthand everyday – the stares, the discomfort of others, the lack of acceptance – all of which can influence an individual’s sense of self. While social situations can often generate anxiety for those with facial birth defects (i.e. cleft palate, port wine stain, downs syndrome) or facial disfigurements (i.e. as the result of stroke, cancer, fire, dog bites, car accidents), spending time in a dental office is one place where people with facial differences should feel welcome and accepted. As health care professionals, we can play a significant leadership role in this regard by setting an example for the way we approach the care of those living with facial differences.

So what can you do to better support the needs of your patients with facial differences? Anna Pileggi, Executive Director of AboutFace offers this advice:

- Get to know the person behind the face – take advantage of the time you spend with your patient to reinforce that the person is most important and their condition is secondary.
- Talk to your patient about their facial difference – most are not averse to talking about it (i.e. “I see that you have cleft palate. Is there anything special that you would like me to be aware of before we start the procedure i.e. grafting, implants?”)
- Use the word ‘difference’ or ‘affected’ and not ‘deformity’ or ‘disfigurement’ as these words suggest there is something wrong or abnormal with the person.
- Call the patient by name – this will help create a welcoming environment.
- Take the time to explain the procedure you are about to do and what tools you will be using to do it – this will help reduce anxiety.
- Learn more about the major characteristics of various facial conditions so that you are better able to support your patient’s needs.
- Offer the patient resources that provide information about facial differences and dentistry so that they can make better informed decisions about their care. Appreciate that your patient may be anxious. Many patients with facial differences are frequently poked and prodded by health care professionals in the course of treating their birth defect or facial disfigurement, which can generate anxiety when undergoing a dental procedure.

If you take these measures, you will become among the privileged few in the person’s life who they trust and feel comfortable with, and that’s important.

AboutFace facilitates emotional, peer and social support, resources, educational programs and public awareness for individuals with facial differences and their families. For more information, or to arrange for a speaker to visit your dental office or regional association meeting, call Jessica at 1-800-665-3223, ext 22 or visit www.aboutface.ca.

AboutFace is a national charitable organization dedicated to helping individuals with facial differences and their families. We support individuals whose differences are present at birth or acquired as a result of disease or trauma. If you or someone you know has a facial difference and would like more information, contact AboutFace at 1-800- 665-FACE or www.aboutface.ca.

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