



### **Ask Our Expert: Spotlight on AAPD President and Pediatric Dentist Dr. Joe Castellano**

*AAPD President Dr. Castellano discusses the results of a new survey conducted on behalf of the AAPD showing gaps in oral health knowledge among parents and caregivers. Read more on this recent survey [here](#).*



**The survey uncovered that while the majority of parents and caregivers responded that their child's oral health was a priority, many are not taking their children to the dentist by their first birthday, as recommended by the AAPD – can you provide some insight into this inconsistency?**

It is great to know the vast majority of parents and caregivers understand oral health care is vital to their child's overall health – and that is an important first step. However, that does not necessarily mean they know what to do to ensure they are taking the best care of little teeth. Especially for first time parents and caregivers. There is so much to learn with your first baby that the importance of establishing a Dental Home by age 1 can get lost in the shuffle. If there is only one message I could tell those new moms and dads, it would be to take their child to a pediatric dentist by age 1 because it sets your little one up for a lifetime of beautiful smiles.

**Many parents and caregivers surveyed stated that a toothache is not a serious ailment. What would you say to those parents and caregivers about the severity of a toothache?**

Toothaches, just as headaches or coming down with a fever, should not be ignored. No matter your age, and especially in younger children, toothaches are often the first warning sign that something is brewing. Toothaches can be indicators of early cavities or infection, so please do not ignore your child's aching tooth, and make an appointment with your pediatric dentist as soon as possible.

**Those surveyed had a mixed understanding of what are healthy foods and snacks for kids' teeth. Nearly half of parents believed pureed fruit pouches are a great option. Can you tell us why this is not the case and share some of your favorite healthy tooth-friendly snacks?**

It may be surprising to many, but pureed fruit is actually one of the least healthy snacks for your children's teeth! Fruit pouches, along with granola bars, have concentrated sugars that latch on to the grooves on little teeth, increasing the rate of potential tooth decay and cavities. Instead, when snack time rolls around, I recommend sticking to carrots and cheese for a healthier option as they help produce saliva and are natural acid neutralizers for a child's mouth.

**Only about half of parents and caregivers surveyed with kids between the ages of 4 and 7 help their children brush their teeth. Why is it important help children at that age brush their teeth?**

Children's fine motor skills are not yet fully developed at a young age, so they still need help to ensure that they are doing a good job at brushing their teeth. The ability to tie one's shoes acts as a gauge for when children can then begin to brush their teeth without supervision, which is typically between the ages of 7 and 8. Of course, let kids flex their independence by giving them the opportunity to do some brushing alone, but have an adult do a "clean sweep" at the end. Parents and caregivers can also help make brushing fun: let them pick out a toothbrush and toothpaste of their choice, and for the younger ones, sing a favorite song as they brush. Importantly, remember to have them brush and floss for two minutes, twice a day!

**Joe B. Castellano, D.D.S.**

Dr. Joe Castellano is the partner in a private practice in Laredo, Texas. He is a graduate of the University of Texas Dental Branch in Houston and completed his one-year residency in advanced general dentistry and later a two-year residency to specialize in the field of pediatric dentistry. Both residencies were completed at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio, Texas. Dr. Castellano is board certified and an assistant Clinical Professor for the Department of Developmental Dentistry at UTHSC-SA Dental School. He is also a graduate of the AAPD Leadership Institute and the AAPD Advanced Leadership Institute. Dr. Castellano is a fellow of the American College of Dentists.