

pediatric pointers



memories of the doctor's office or a visit to the hospital. Keep a colorful lab coat handy to put on when working with a child patient, and keep some colorful stickers available.

Consider providing some flexible early morning or evening appointments for your adult patients with small children, like stay-at-home moms or dads, who may find it difficult to come to the office during daytime hours due to child care issues. If your patient is a child, evening appointments can allow both parents or other caregivers to attend and participate in the testing and discussion. You might prepare a second information packet of brochures or reprints related to hearing loss, middle ear problems, or speech and language development and stimulation to be shared with a grandparent or preschool teacher, as well.

You've probably chosen your waiting room furniture carefully for the comfort of your adult patients. Avoid coffee tables or end tables with pointed corners and glass tops; rounded corners will be easier on everyone. Place coffee makers and cups high out of the reach of curious hands. Check that electrical cords are out of harm's way. Certainly most parents are conscientious about watching their children, but little ones can be very fast and creative.

For both the waiting room and the test booth, choose sturdy toys that are made of plastic or other non-porous materials that can be easily disinfected on a daily basis rather than stuffed animals and cloth toys. Don't forget the play table and chairs, too. Oaktree Products (www.oaktreeproducts.com) offers an excellent selection of infection control products. And beware of small toys that could be choking hazards for young children. Consider child-proofing your office as if a toddler lived there, including covering the electrical outlets. If you haven't lived with a toddler, speak with your friends who do! You might even ask them to visit your office and review it with their sharp parental eyes.

Making your office child-friendly needn't be time-consuming or expensive. It's mostly about common sense and perhaps seeing your office from a very different perspective—one that is through the eyes and hands of an exploring toddler. Having a child-friendly office environment and staff demonstrates to parents that you as a professional are thoughtful of their concerns, as well as familiar with the unique needs of their children. **\$**

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Is Your Office Child-Friendly?

We've all been to the pediatrician's office at one point or another, either as a patient or a parent. They usually have a variety of cute items and "tricks" to make even reluctant or timid children feel more at ease. While you can't be expected to dress your office in the same imaginative, child-focused décor that you'd find in a metropolitan children's hospital, there are numerous ways to make your office more child-friendly, especially if evaluating children is not in your daily routine.

Make Your Office Welcoming

"OK," you're thinking. "I already have some pint-sized chairs, a table and a box of crayons in my waiting room; besides, my office sees mostly adults." Even so, be prepared for children who may accompany family members to an appointment, as well as those occasional pediatric referrals. Offer reading material that will appeal to a wide range of ages—picture books for young children, *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, or the *Nickelodeon* magazine. Do you have a TV in your office that plays CNN all day? Some parents may be concerned about the violence and PG-nature of many news programs and talk shows, not to mention those steamy soap scenes. Consider keeping the TV tuned to family-friendly channels like ABC Family, the Disney Channel or TV Land—who doesn't enjoy reruns of *The Andy Griffith Show* or *Leave It to Beaver*? If you don't have cable channels, an assortment of family-oriented movies will work, too. Keep the volume reasonable and turn the captions on!

Wearing a white coat adds to professionalism in the office, but it can be an unpleasant or distressing signal to children, evoking

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