

The Pediatric Dental Practice Profitability Guide

SEVEN PROVEN STRATEGIES TO
INCREASE PROFITS AND STRENGTHEN
YOUR PRACTICE

Practical ideas you can implement right
away for a stronger, more profitable practice.

PDTA
PEDIATRIC DENTAL TEAM ASSOCIATION

1. Review and Adjust Your Fees Annually

When was the last time you took a serious look at your fees?

The cost of running your practice increases every year. Salaries, benefits, supplies, laboratory expenses, technology, software, credit card processing fees, utilities, and countless other expenses continue to rise. Your fees need to keep pace with the increasing cost of doing business.

Review your fees at least annually and make adjustments when appropriate. Even small increases across the practice can make a significant difference over the course of a year.

Don't stop with your usual fees. Take a close look at the reimbursement you are receiving from every insurance plan with which you participate. Know what each plan is actually paying for the procedures you provide most frequently and determine whether those reimbursements are financially acceptable for your practice.

If a plan's reimbursement has not kept pace with your costs, ask for a fee increase. Don't assume the answer will be no simply because you haven't asked.

Establish what you consider an acceptable reimbursement level for your practice. If a plan consistently reimburses below that threshold and you are unable to negotiate an acceptable increase, it may be time to evaluate whether continuing to participate in that plan makes financial sense.

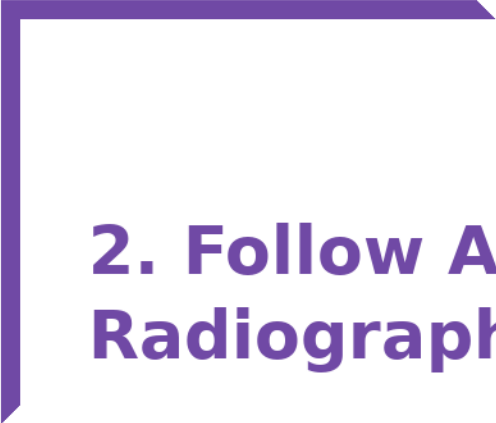
The same evaluation applies when considering whether to participate with a new plan. Don't make the decision based solely on the promise of more patients. Look carefully at the reimbursement schedule and determine whether you can provide the quality of care you expect while remaining profitable at those fees.

Your fees shouldn't be determined by what an insurance company is willing to pay. They should reflect the cost of providing excellent pediatric dental care and operating a healthy, sustainable practice.

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

When evaluating your fees, don't forget expenses that are easy to overlook—credit card processing, software subscriptions, technology, team benefits, supplies, and other costs that quietly increase year after year.





2. Follow Appropriate Radiographic Guidelines

Radiographs are an important part of comprehensive pediatric dental care—but one schedule does not fit every patient.

Establish clear radiographic standards for your practice based on the AAPD Best Practices: Prescribing Dental Radiographs for Infants, Children, Adolescents, and Individuals with Special Health Care Needs.

The need for radiographs should be determined by the dentist based on the individual patient, including factors such as:

- Age and stage of dental development
- Caries risk
- Clinical findings and dental history
- Physical and medical health
- Special health care needs
- Previous radiographs and the information they provide

Most importantly, don't allow insurance coverage to determine appropriate patient care. If a radiograph is clinically indicated, the decision to prescribe it should be based on the patient's needs—not simply on whether an insurance plan will reimburse for it.

Your team also needs to understand your practice's radiographic standards. When everyone knows what is expected and there is a consistent system for reviewing each patient's needs, appropriate radiographs are less likely to be overlooked.

Training and technique matter, too. Your clinical team should be trained to obtain diagnostic-quality radiographs efficiently and consistently—ideally on the first attempt—regardless of the patient's age. Pediatric radiography can be challenging, and when a team member is struggling with positioning, technique, or patient cooperation, provide additional training and practice rather than accepting repeated retakes as routine.

A well-trained clinical team improves efficiency, reduces unnecessary retakes, minimizes radiation exposure, keeps the schedule moving, and helps ensure the dentist has the diagnostic information needed to provide appropriate care.

CONSISTENCY COUNTS

Establish your radiographic standards, train your team in pediatric radiographic techniques, and make reviewing each patient's radiographic needs part of your routine clinical system.



3. Maximize the Preventive/Recare Visit

A recare visit should be much more than “a cleaning and a checkup.” It is an opportunity to take a holistic view of the patient—not simply their teeth or oral cavity—and evaluate the child's overall preventive, developmental, and therapeutic needs.

Take a fresh look at what your practice is evaluating and providing during these visits. Depending on the individual patient, opportunities may include:

- Sealants
- Silver diamine fluoride (SDF)
- Individualized oral hygiene instruction
- Home fluoride recommendations
- Evaluation of whether the child still needs parental assistance or supervision with home care
- Periodontal evaluation and appropriate therapeutic care, particularly for adolescents and patients in orthodontic treatment

- Airway evaluation when appropriate
- Orthodontic evaluation and services, if offered by the practice; refer to an appropriate provider if necessary
- Whitening for appropriate adolescent patients, if offered by the practice
- Appropriate radiographs based on the patient's individual needs

For adolescents—especially those in orthodontic treatment—don't overlook periodontal needs.

Determine what therapeutic services can appropriately be provided in your practice and establish guidelines for when referral to a periodontist is indicated.

Don't Let Patients Leave Without a Plan to Return

Having an active patient base doesn't help your patients—or your profitability—if those patients aren't returning consistently for recare.

Establish a clear system for scheduling the patient's next visit before the family leaves the office. Some practices have the clinical team schedule the next recare appointment before the patient leaves the treatment area. Others have the front desk schedule it during checkout.

There is no one right way. There does need to be a system.

Everyone should know who is responsible so patients don't unintentionally leave without their next appropriate visit scheduled.

LOOK BEYOND THE PROPHY

Don't allow a routine recare visit to become routine care. Look at the whole child, identify what this patient needs today, and make sure your team is trained to recognize and communicate those needs.



4. Make Your Schedule Work Smarter

Your practice hours don't have to look like everyone else's.

Traditional 8-4 or 9-5 hours may be convenient, but they aren't necessarily the best fit for your patients, your team, or your practice. Consider whether alternative hours could provide families with greater access to care while allowing you to use your clinical time more efficiently.

Try starting very early one day and finishing shortly after lunch. On another day, start later and offer appointments into the early evening. These hours can provide highly desirable before-school and after-school appointment times while also giving team members time during traditional business hours for their own appointments and personal needs.

And working different hours doesn't have to mean working more hours. A thoughtfully designed schedule can improve productivity while creating a work schedule your team values.

Keep the Patients Flowing—Not Arriving in Waves

Look at when you schedule appointments, too.

If multiple patients are scheduled on the hour and half-hour, they tend to arrive together, need to be seated together, finish together, and arrive at checkout together. Meanwhile, the next group of patients is walking through the front door.

The result can be predictable bottlenecks at both ends of the visit: delayed check-in, patients being seated late, rushed checkout, longer waits, and a front desk trying to handle several families at once.

Consider staggering appointment times by 10 or 15 minutes when appropriate. A small scheduling change can help distribute check-in and checkout throughout the hour, improve patient flow, and give the front desk time to properly complete each family's visit—including scheduling the next appointment.

The goal isn't simply to fill every available space on the schedule. The goal is to create a schedule that allows the entire practice to work efficiently from the first patient of the day to the last.

IT WORKED IN MY PRACTICE FOR 35 YEARS

In my pediatric dental practice, we used alternative hours for 35 years. On Mondays, my team arrived at 10:30, we held our huddle at 11:30, and patients were scheduled from noon until 6:00. On Thursdays, we huddled at 6:30 a.m., saw our first patient at 7:00, and finished around 1:00 p.m.

We worked straight through using staggered 30-minute team breaks so patient care continued throughout the day. The schedule gave families early-morning and late-day choices, gave my team time for personal appointments, and gave us a long weekend every week.

Fridays could still be used by administrative team members and rotating clinical assistants for equipment maintenance, testing, and other responsibilities.

You don't need to use my schedule. The point is to create the schedule that works best for your patients, your team, and your practice.





5. Offer Flexible Payment Options—and Know What They Cost You

Even when parents understand and want the treatment you recommend, finances can become a barrier to moving forward. Providing several payment options gives families choices while helping your practice maintain healthy collections and cash flow.

Today's families expect convenience. Credit and debit cards are now a routine part of doing business, and relatively few families pay substantial dental bills with cash. Your practice should make payment easy—but you should also understand what those conveniences are costing you.

Review the payment options you currently offer and consider whether they meet the needs of your families. Options might include:

- Major credit and debit cards
- Third-party healthcare financing

- Clearly defined in-office payment arrangements when appropriate
- A practice membership or in-office dental plan for families without dental benefits

If you offer in-office payment arrangements, establish clear guidelines. Determine how much must be collected before treatment begins, when the remaining balance is due, and who on the team has the authority to make exceptions. A flexible payment policy shouldn't become an inconsistent payment policy.

Membership plans can also provide an option for families without dental benefits. A thoughtfully designed plan can encourage families to maintain regular preventive care while providing predictable benefits and payment expectations for both the family and the practice.

Don't Forget What It Costs to Get Paid

Credit-card processing fees, third-party financing fees, and other transaction costs can seem small individually, but they add up over thousands of transactions.

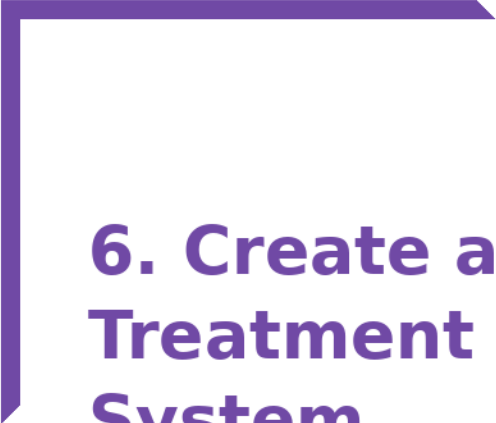
Review those costs periodically. Know what your practice is paying and compare processing arrangements when appropriate.

These expenses should be considered part of the normal cost of doing business—not an unexpected loss each time a parent uses a credit card. Include them, along with your other operating expenses, when evaluating the overall fee structure of your practice.

That brings us right back to #1: your fees need to reflect what it actually costs to provide excellent pediatric dental care.

MAKE IT EASY TO SAY YES

Give families clear financial choices and make those choices easy to understand. Whatever options you offer, establish a system so every team member communicates them consistently and knows when—and to whom—a financial conversation should be handed off.



6. Create a Consistent Treatment Presentation System

Recommending the right treatment is only part of the process. Parents also need to understand what their child needs, why it is needed, what their options are, and what happens next.

How you accomplish that can look very different from one pediatric dental practice to another.

In some practices, the clinical team member reviews the treatment plan chairside and discusses financial options with the parent. In others, the clinical team explains the recommended treatment and then hands the parent off to a treatment coordinator, financial coordinator, or patient coordinator who discusses insurance benefits, payment options, and scheduling.

There is no one right way. What matters is having a clearly defined system that everyone understands and follows.

Make the Handoff Seamless

When more than one team member is involved, the handoff is critical.

The financial or treatment coordinator should know what has already been discussed before beginning the conversation with the parent. That may include the treatment the doctor has recommended, how it was explained, questions the parent asked, concerns they expressed, and anything else that could affect moving forward.

The parent shouldn't have to start over and explain everything again.

A good handoff allows the appropriate team member to continue the conversation seamlessly while the doctor and clinical team move on to the next patient. That is better service for the family and a more efficient use of everyone's time.

Make Sure Everyone Is Saying the Same Thing

Consistency in language is just as important as consistency in workflow.

Develop scripting and communication guidelines for common conversations about treatment, insurance benefits, financial arrangements, and scheduling. Scripting doesn't mean everyone has to memorize identical sentences or sound rehearsed. It means your team has agreed upon clear, accurate, consistent language so parents don't receive conflicting information depending on whom they ask.

Train the team, practice the handoffs, and periodically listen to how treatment is actually being presented. A system only works when the people using it understand it and use it consistently.

When parents understand the treatment being recommended, trust the people presenting it, receive consistent information, and clearly understand their financial options, they are better equipped to make informed decisions about their child's care.

DON'T LEAVE THE HANDOFF TO CHANCE

Decide who says what, when they say it, and who takes over next. Then train your team to follow the same process consistently. A smooth treatment presentation shouldn't depend on which team members happen to be working that day.





7. Use Social Media to Show What Makes Your Practice Different

Today's parents often look online before deciding where to take their children for healthcare. Your website, social media presence, and online reviews may introduce them to your practice long before anyone on your team has an opportunity to speak with them.

So ask yourself:

What will they see—and will it show them why your practice is different from every other pediatric dental practice they could choose?

Social media gives you an opportunity to show prospective families who you really are. Share the personality of your practice, introduce your team, show your culture, and highlight the things you do that create a special experience for children and parents.

But social media isn't only about attracting new patients. It can also help you educate and engage the families you already serve.

Use it to:

- Educate parents about oral health, prevention, dental development, nutrition, fluoride, sealants, emergencies, and other pediatric dental topics.
- Reinforce brushing, flossing, diet, and other home-care recommendations between visits.
- Introduce services families may not realize your practice provides.
- Celebrate your team and show the personality and culture of your practice.
- Share seasonal activities, community involvement, contests, celebrations, and other things that make your office unique.
- Encourage and share appropriate patient and parent reviews and testimonials.
- Remind families that your practice is a resource for them—not just a place they visit every six months.

Look at the Talent Already on Your Team

Before automatically hiring an outside company to manage your social media, look at the people already working in your practice.

You may have a team member who loves social media, photography, video, writing, or creating content. More importantly, that person already knows your patients and parents. They know the questions families ask, what interests them, your team's personalities, your practice culture, and all the little things that make your office different.

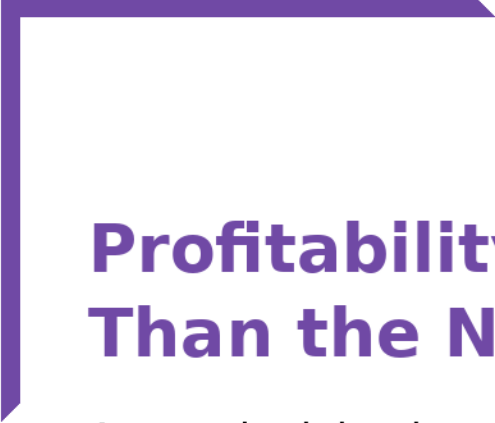
An outside marketing company may create beautiful content—but it doesn't live inside your practice every day.

If you have a team member with the interest and ability, consider giving that person responsibility for helping manage your social media. Provide clear expectations and guidelines, give them appropriate time to do the job, and let their knowledge of your practice help tell your story rather than a generic dental story.

Social media can become much more than marketing. Used well, it can strengthen relationships with existing families, educate parents, reinforce healthy behaviors, showcase your team, attract new patients, and communicate what makes your pediatric dental practice special.

NEVER RUN OUT OF IDEAS

You don't have to continually invent something new to post. Look at what's already happening in your practice, what parents are asking, what's happening seasonally, and what your team wants families to know. PDTA members receive a newsletter filled with practical marketing ideas—including seasonal and timely ideas they can easily adapt and use in their own practices.



Profitability Is About More Than the Numbers

As you look back over these seven areas, there is a common thread.

Increasing profitability isn't simply about raising fees, adding services, seeing more patients, or cutting expenses. It is about creating a practice that works efficiently and consistently.

That requires clear systems. It requires a team that understands what is expected, communicates consistently, and has the training and tools to do their jobs well. And it requires periodically stepping back from the day-to-day demands of the practice to ask:

Is there a better way for us to do this?

Every pediatric dental practice is different. The opportunities in your practice may not be the same as those in another. Taking an objective look at how your practice is functioning can help you identify where greater consistency, stronger systems, or additional team development could make the greatest difference.

You Don't Have to Create It All Yourself

The Pediatric Dental Team Association (PDTA) was created specifically for pediatric dental practices.

PDTA provides practical systems, training, scripts, team-development resources, onboarding tools, leadership guidance, and ideas that practices can adapt to fit the way they work. The Pediatric Practice Assessment can also help you take a closer look at your practice and identify areas that may deserve your attention.

Members receive ongoing resources as well, including the PDTA newsletter with practical and seasonal marketing ideas to help keep their practices connected with their patients and communities.

The goal isn't to tell you there is only one right way to run your practice.

It's to help you create clear systems, develop a confident team, and build the consistency that allows your practice to run better every day.

**READY TO TAKE A CLOSER LOOK
AT YOUR PRACTICE?**

Visit thePDTA.org to learn more about the Pediatric Dental Team Association and the resources available to you and your team.

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