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Safety Dental Reminders & Sports Mouthguards

As we slowly retire our snow blowers for the season and look forward to new seasons of little league and soccer, safety once again comes into play. Just as a quick slip on the ice or snow can cause some unwanted injury, a simple trip on the sidewalk or collision with a teammate can send you and your family straight to the emergency room. We see more dental trauma during the first few sunny spring days than most of the winter months combined. Those children that 'wished for their two front teeth for Christmas' now have to protect those newly erupted permanent teeth from trauma.

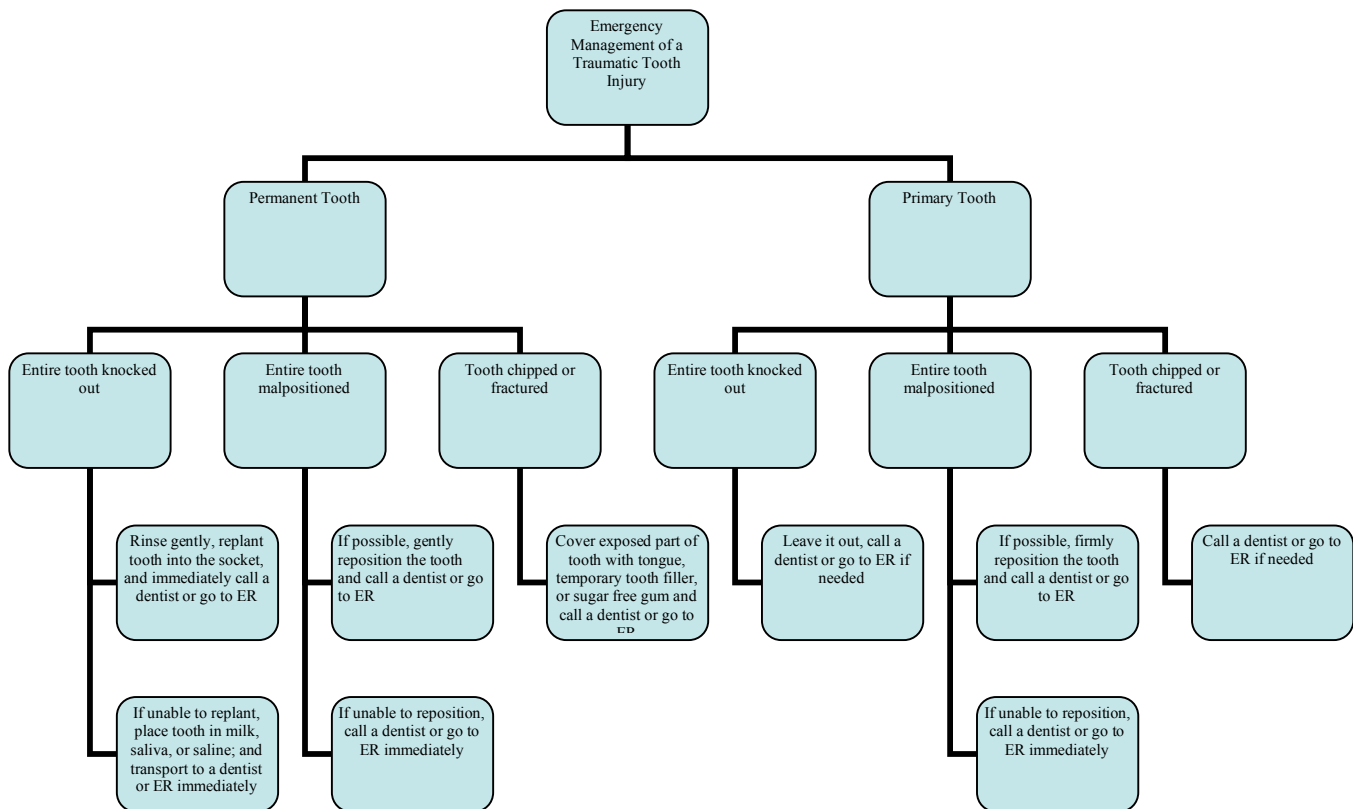
Obviously, no one plans for or wants to sign up for the unpleasant, unexpected trip to the dental office or emergency room with a traumatized child, but being prepared can be the difference between losing a permanent front tooth and saving it! The best preparation is prevention, and the best prevention is protection. Children involved in sports where physical contact is a risk, should wear the appropriate sports safety equipment. Part of this equipment is a properly fitted sports mouthguard. Numerous types of mouthguards are available, from the simple 'boil-n-bite' clear guard to the professionally made, custom fit guard like the pro's use.

Children with primary teeth (less than 6 years old) or mixed dentitions (6-12 years old), maybe better suited to use a simple 'boil-n-bite' sports mouthguard. At these ages, teeth and jaw size changes every season, and a professionally made, custom fit sports guard generally cannot be 'refit' to changing teeth. Boil-n-bit guards can sometimes be refit, or if needed, they are inexpensive enough to be discarded and a new one purchased and fit. Most sporting goods stores carry this simple type of mouthguard. Once fitted, take the mouthguard to your dentist so he or she can check it for a safe, accurate fit.

For children (or adults) with permanent teeth (generally 13 years old and up), a custom fit sports guard is the best option. The better the accuracy and fit of the guard, the better it will protect those pearly whites!

In addition to protecting the teeth from chipping or fracture, sports mouthguards can protect the gums, lips, cheeks, and other soft tissues of the mouth. Finally and possibly most importantly, it has been shown that properly fitted athletic mouthguards help prevent head injuries and concussions by absorbing shock and trauma. If you have any questions regarding which mouthguard is appropriate for your child, please contact your local dentist.

In the unforeseen event you witness or experience a dental emergency this spring, here are some guidelines of how to deal with the situation. First, determine the age of the child and the extent of the injury. Are there teeth involved or just soft tissues (lips, cheeks, gums, and tongue)? Are the involved teeth permanent or primary? Once you have determined there are permanent teeth involved, you need to assess the extent of the injury to those teeth. Was the permanent tooth knocked all the way out or just chipped? Was it pushed back or jammed up into the gums? Use the adjacent teeth as a reference and ask the parents if the child's teeth "look normal" to them. Use the flow chart below to "troubleshoot" the situation and determine the appropriate actions. When in doubt, call your dentist or simply dial 911.



When the entire permanent adult tooth is avulsed (knocked-out), time is of the essence. The sooner it can be replanted into its socket (5 minutes or less is best), the

better the chance for it to reattach and be saved. Simply rinse the tooth and root gently with water or saline and immediately replant the entire tooth back into its socket. If you are unable to replant the avulsed tooth, place the tooth in a suitable transport media (water, saline, saliva, or milk), and immediately proceed to your nearest dentist or ER. In general, teeth replanted within one hour of being knocked out can reattach and survive with minimal trauma. The longer the tooth is out, the less chance for successful reattachment.

It only takes one quick acting parent, coach, or loved one to make the right decision in a timely fashion and potentially save a permanent tooth. Hopefully this information will arm you with the knowledge and confidence to be that person!

Dr. Brent Kolb of Dexter Family Dentistry, P.C. makes complimentary, custom fit athletic mouthguards for all Dexter athletes (\$50 value). Also, if you'd like a complimentary copy of this article and flow chart to keep with your team's medical emergency kit, Call Dr. Kolb and his helpful staff at 734.426.9000.