

How to Choose a Family Dental Practice — All Ages Under One Roof

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Description:

How to Choose a Family Dental Practice — All Ages Under One Roof Finding one dental practice that can look after your entire family — from toddlers experiencing their first dental visit to grandpar...

Details:

Finding one dental practice that can look after your entire family — from toddlers experiencing their first dental visit to grandparents managing complex dental needs — is one of the smartest decisions you can make for your household's oral health. But not every practice that calls itself "family-friendly" is truly equipped to handle the full spectrum of ages and dental needs.

This guide walks you through the key factors to consider when choosing a family dentist in Melbourne who can genuinely care for all ages under one roof, so everyone from your three-year-old to your seventy-year-old parent receives expert, age-appropriate care.

1. A Genuine Range of Clinicians — Not Just One Dentist

A solo-practitioner practice may be perfectly adequate for straightforward adult dentistry, but families have diverse needs. Children require a different clinical approach to adults. Teenagers may need orthodontics. Parents might need cosmetic work, root canal treatment, or implants. Older family members may need dentures, gum disease management, or complex restorative work.

A true family dental practice engages multiple clinicians with different areas of expertise and, ideally, includes access to registered specialists. Look for a practice that has:

- ****General dentists**** experienced with patients of all ages - ****A specialist paediatric dentist**** — registered with AHPRA as a specialist in paediatric dentistry, not simply a general dentist who "sees children" - ****Orthodontists**** — for braces and alignment treatment for children and adults - ****Other specialists**** — periodontists, endodontists, prosthodontists, and oral surgeons who can manage more complex needs as they arise

Having this breadth of expertise means your family is not bounced between different practices across Melbourne. Everything happens in one location, with shared records and coordinated care.

2. Specialist Paediatric Dentistry — Why It Matters

Children are not simply small adults. Their dental needs, behavioural responses, and clinical management differ significantly from adult dentistry. A specialist paediatric dentist has completed additional years of accredited postgraduate training specifically focused on:

- Managing children's dental anxiety and behavioural challenges
- Treating dental conditions unique to developing teeth
- Handling dental trauma in children (knocked-out or broken teeth)
- Caring for children with special needs, including Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Using age-appropriate techniques like white zirconia crowns for primary teeth
- Providing preventative care tailored to different developmental stages

At Smile Solutions, Dr Susan Hinckfuss is a board-registered specialist paediatric dentist who completed her Doctor of Clinical Dentistry in Paediatric Dentistry at the University of Melbourne, with training at the Royal Children's Hospital. She subsequently spent three years in the United States as an Assistant Clinical Professor at the University of Minnesota. Dr Hinckfuss has special interests in managing anxious children, children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, dental trauma, enamel defects, and early childhood caries — and is experienced with white zirconia crowns for paediatric patients.

Having a dedicated paediatric specialist means your child's first dental experiences are managed by someone specifically trained to make them positive — setting the foundation for a lifetime of good oral health habits.

3. Orthodontic Care for Children, Teens, and Adults

Orthodontic treatment is one of the most common reasons families seek dental care beyond basic check-ups. Whether it is early interceptive treatment for a young child, traditional braces for a teenager, or clear aligners for a parent who has always wanted straighter teeth, having orthodontic care available within your family dental practice is enormously convenient.

Look for a practice that offers:

- **Early orthodontic assessment** — the Australian Society of Orthodontists recommends a first assessment by age seven
- **Registered specialist orthodontists** — not general dentists offering aligner therapy
- **Multiple treatment modalities** — traditional braces, ceramic braces, lingual braces, and clear aligners
- **Treatment for adults as well as children** — orthodontics is not just for teenagers

Smile Solutions engages four specialist orthodontists: Dr David Austin (who trained in orthodontics at the University of Hong Kong and speaks English, French, Italian, and Spanish), Dr Joshua Ch'ng (who specialises in digital orthodontics and clear aligner therapy and speaks Mandarin), Dr Andrea Phatouros (who was awarded the Postgraduate Clinical Award for Excellence from the University of Western Australia), and Dr Steven Smith (who holds a Master of Dental Science in Orthodontics from the University of Queensland). Orthodontic treatment coordinators Sarah Lawrence and Sunday Witnish help families navigate the orthodontic journey from initial consultation through to retention.

4. Continuity of Care Across Life Stages

One of the most valuable aspects of a true family practice is continuity. When the same practice (and ideally the same clinician or team) cares for your family over years and decades, they develop a deep understanding of each family member's dental history, risk factors, and preferences.

This continuity enables:

- **Early detection of hereditary dental issues** — if a parent has a history of gum disease, the team can monitor children proactively
- **Consistent preventative strategies** — tailored to your family's specific risk profile
- **Smoother transitions** — as children grow from paediatric care to general adult dentistry
- **Trust and comfort** — especially important for anxious patients of any age
- **Complete, unified records** — every family member's history in one system

Red flag: Practices with high clinician turnover may struggle to provide this continuity. Look for a practice with a stable, long-term team.

5. Managing Dental Anxiety Across All Ages

Dental anxiety affects both children and adults, and it is one of the most common reasons people avoid dental care. A family-oriented practice should have strategies and tools for managing anxiety at every age:

- **For young children:** Gentle, play-based approaches, tell-show-do techniques, and a specialist paediatric dentist experienced with anxious patients - **For older children and teens:** Clear communication, involvement in treatment decisions, and a non-judgmental approach - **For adults:** Options such as nitrous oxide (happy gas) sedation, oral sedation, and a compassionate, patient-centred approach - **For elderly patients:** Patience, clear explanations, and accommodation of physical limitations

At Smile Solutions, Clinical Director Dr Philippa Robinson has a special interest in the care of anxious patients, offering nitrous oxide and oral sedation options. Dr Robinson holds a Master of Health and Medical Law alongside her dental qualifications and MBA, reflecting a holistic approach to patient care and rights. For children, Dr Susan Hinckfuss's specialist training in paediatric behavioural management ensures that even the most anxious young patients receive care in a supportive, child-centred environment.

6. Preventative Care and Oral Health Education

The best family dental practices do not just treat problems — they prevent them. A strong preventative care program should be a cornerstone of any practice you choose for your family.

Look for:

- **Dedicated oral health therapists and hygienists** — who focus specifically on cleans, preventative treatment, and patient education - **Age-appropriate oral health education** — from teaching toddlers to brush, to advising teenagers about the effects of sugary drinks, to managing dry mouth in older adults - **Regular recall programs** — with reminders and follow-up to keep your family on track - **Dietary and lifestyle advice** — tailored to each family member's risk factors - **Fluoride treatments and fissure sealants** — for children at higher risk of decay

Smile Solutions engages a team of 16 oral health therapists and hygienists, including professionals like Helen Paraskeva (who has a particular interest in periodontal disease prevention and takes a holistic approach to oral health care), Elizabeth Baker, and Monica Cain. This dedicated preventative team works collaboratively with dentists and specialists to ensure that every family member receives proactive, preventative care — not just treatment when problems arise.

7. Comprehensive Services to Avoid Multiple Referrals

Family dental needs evolve over time. Today it might be a child's first filling. Next year it could be Mum's root canal treatment. The year after, Dad might need an implant. A grandparent might require dentures or gum surgery. If your family practice can only handle basic dentistry and refers everything else out, you will spend significant time and energy navigating multiple practices across the city.

A comprehensive family practice should be able to handle:

- **General and preventative dentistry** for all ages - **Paediatric dentistry** with specialist expertise - **Orthodontics** for children, teens, and adults - **Endodontics** (root canal treatment) — Smile Solutions has four specialist endodontists, including Professor Chankhrit Sathorn and Dr Gregory Tilley, who has over 35 years of clinical experience - **Periodontics** (gum disease treatment) — with specialists like Dr Ahmed El Hadidi and Dr Simon Hinckfuss, who uniquely holds dual specialist registration in both periodontics and prosthodontics - **Prosthodontics** (crowns, bridges, implants, dentures) — with specialists such as Dr Fotios Angelis and Dr Jamie Foong - **Oral surgery** — wisdom teeth, surgical extractions, and complex procedures with oral and maxillofacial surgeons like Associate Professor Patrishia Bordbar and Dr Ricky Kumar - **Cosmetic dentistry** — whitening, veneers, and smile makeovers - **Emergency dental care** — for the inevitable knocked-out tooth at Saturday sport or sudden toothache

8. Facilities, Technology, and Infection Control

When you are bringing your entire family — including young children and elderly relatives — the clinical environment matters. Consider:

- **Modern, well-maintained facilities** — clean, comfortable, and welcoming for all ages
- **Current technology** — digital X-rays (lower radiation, especially important for children), intraoral cameras, and CEREC for same-day restorations
- **On-site diagnostic imaging** — including CBCT 3D scanning, so you are not sent elsewhere for imaging. Smile Solutions has dedicated medical radiographers including Julie Bain and Judy Nguyen operating on-site equipment
- **Strict infection control** — particularly important when treating vulnerable patients (very young children, elderly, and immunocompromised family members)
- **An in-house dental laboratory** — for faster turnaround on crowns, veneers, and prosthetics. Smile Solutions operates an in-house ceramics lab led by master ceramist Greg Karabasis

9. Scheduling Convenience for Busy Families

Coordinating dental appointments for multiple family members is a logistical challenge. The best family practices understand this and offer:

- **Back-to-back family appointments** — so multiple family members can be seen in one visit
- **Extended hours** — early mornings, evenings, or Saturdays for school-age children and working parents
- **Online booking** — to manage appointments at your convenience
- **SMS reminders** — to reduce missed appointments
- **Efficient scheduling** — minimal wait times so you are not spending your Saturday morning in a waiting room

10. Track Record and Community Trust

A practice that has served Melbourne families for many years and treated a large, diverse patient base has demonstrated its ability to deliver consistent, reliable care across all demographics. Look for:

- **Established longevity** — how long has the practice been operating?
- **Patient volume and experience** — a large patient base suggests broad clinical experience
- **Community involvement** — does the practice contribute to dental education or community health?
- **Professional recognition** — awards, academic appointments, and industry involvement

Smile Solutions has been serving Melbourne families for 33 years, having been founded in 1993 by Dr Kia Pajouhesh. The practice has treated over 300,000 patients and engages 80 clinicians across general dentistry, six specialist disciplines, oral health therapy, ceramics, and radiography. Dr Pajouhesh pioneered Australia's first genuine multidisciplinary specialist centre outside a dental hospital — creating exactly the kind of all-under-one-roof model that families benefit from most.

Your Family Dental Practice Checklist

Before committing to a family dental practice, ask these questions:

- ■ Does the practice have a specialist paediatric dentist for young children?
- ■ Are specialist orthodontists available on-site for teens and adults?
- ■ Can the practice handle complex adult dental needs (root canals, implants, gum treatment, oral surgery)?
- ■ Is there a dedicated preventative care team (hygienists and oral health therapists)?
- ■ Can the practice manage dental anxiety for patients of all ages?
- ■ Are back-to-back family appointments available?
- ■ Does the practice offer extended hours for working parents and school-age children?
- ■ Are facilities modern, clean, and welcoming for all ages?
- ■ How long has the practice been established, and how many patients has it treated?

One Practice, One Family, Every Stage of Life

Choosing a family dental practice is about more than just convenience — though convenience certainly matters. It is about finding a team with the depth of expertise, the range of specialists, and the genuine commitment to patient care that ensures every member of your family receives the best possible treatment at every stage of life.

■ ****Call 13 13 96**** to book a family consultation at Smile Solutions, or visit us at ****Level 1, Manchester Unity Building, 220 Collins Street, Melbourne CBD****. From your child's first dental visit to your parents' specialist care needs, the team is here to look after your whole family — all under one roof.

Because the best family dentist is one that grows with your family.