

# Children's Dentist in Melbourne - Specialist Paediatric Care vs General Practice at Smile Solutions

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## Description:

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## Details:

Finding the right dentist for your child is one of the most important health decisions a parent can make. A positive early experience sets the foundation for a lifetime of good oral health, while a negative one can create dental anxiety that persists well into adulthood. But when Melbourne parents search for a "children's dentist," the results can be confusing. Many general dental practices market themselves as "family-friendly" or "kid-friendly," yet there is a significant difference between a general dentist who sees children and a specialist paediatric dentist who has completed years of additional training specifically in children's dental care.

This guide explains what to look for in a children's dental provider, why specialist qualifications matter, and how Smile Solutions' dedicated paediatric dental team compares to the alternatives available across Melbourne.

### ## Understanding the Difference: General Dentist vs Specialist Paediatric Dentist

In Australia, any registered general dentist can legally treat children. Many do so competently and with genuine care. However, a specialist paediatric dentist has completed a minimum of three additional years of full-time university training beyond their dental degree, focusing exclusively on:

- The growth and development of children's teeth, jaws, and facial structures
- Behaviour management techniques for anxious or uncooperative children
- Dental treatment under sedation or general anaesthesia for young patients
- Management of dental trauma (knocked-out or broken teeth from falls and sports)
- Treatment of children with special needs, medical complexities, or disabilities
- Interceptive orthodontic assessment and early intervention

This distinction matters. A general dentist who advertises "we love kids" may genuinely enjoy treating children, but they have not undergone the rigorous specialist training required to manage complex paediatric cases, severe dental anxiety, or the unique developmental issues that arise in growing mouths.

AHPRA (the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency) maintains a public register of all dental specialists. Parents can verify whether their child's dentist holds genuine specialist registration in paediatric dentistry or is simply a general dentist who treats children as part of a broader practice.

### ## What to Look For in a Children's Dental Provider

When choosing a dentist for your child, consider these key factors:

### ### 1. Specialist Qualifications

Ask whether the dentist treating your child is an AHPRA-registered specialist in paediatric dentistry. This is the single most reliable indicator of advanced training in children's dental care. A Doctor of Clinical Dentistry (DClinDent) in Paediatric Dentistry, or equivalent postgraduate qualification, represents thousands of hours of supervised specialist training.

### ### 2. Experience with Dental Anxiety in Children

Children's dental anxiety is not simply a matter of being "scared of the dentist." It is a well-documented clinical challenge that requires specific behavioural management techniques, including tell-show-do, distraction, desensitisation, and in some cases, sedation or general anaesthesia. Ask how the practice manages anxious children and what options are available if your child is unable to cooperate for treatment.

### ### 3. Child-Friendly Environment

A genuinely child-focused practice will have purpose-built treatment areas designed for young patients, with age-appropriate waiting areas, smaller dental instruments, and staff trained in paediatric communication. Look beyond surface-level decorations to see whether the environment is truly designed around children's needs.

### ### 4. Access to Other Specialists

Children's dental needs can be interconnected. A child who needs early orthodontic assessment, treatment under sedation supervised by an oral surgeon, or management of a dental injury may need multiple specialists. Practices with on-site access to orthodontists, oral and maxillofacial surgeons, and other dental specialists can provide seamless, coordinated care without the delays and inconvenience of external referrals.

### ### 5. Preventive Focus and Education

The best children's dental providers emphasise prevention over treatment. Look for practices that offer comprehensive oral hygiene education, dietary advice, fissure sealants, fluoride treatments, and programs that engage children in their own dental health from an early age.

### ### 6. Pathways for Growing Up

Children's dental needs change as they grow. A practice that can transition your child from paediatric care to orthodontic treatment and eventually to adult dentistry provides continuity that benefits long-term oral health. This is particularly valuable during the mixed dentition years (ages 6 to 12), when baby teeth and adult teeth coexist and early intervention can prevent more complex problems later.

## ## How Smile Solutions Compares

Smile Solutions, located in the Manchester Unity Building at 220 Collins Street in Melbourne's CBD, takes a fundamentally different approach to children's dentistry. Rather than relying on general dentists who happen to treat children, Smile Solutions employs three AHPRA-registered specialist paediatric dentists as part of a multidisciplinary team of over 80 clinicians.

### ### Three Specialist Paediatric Dentists

**\*\*Dr Susan Hinckfuss (BDSc, DCD)\*\*** has been a registered specialist paediatric dentist since 2010, bringing over 15 years of specialist experience in managing children's dental health. Her Doctor of Clinical Dentistry represents years of advanced training beyond her dental degree.

**\*\*Dr Sarah Scott (BBiomedSci (Hons), BDent, DClinDent (Paeds))\*\*** holds a Doctor of Clinical Dentistry in Paediatric Dentistry, the gold-standard specialist qualification. Her background in biomedical science adds depth to her understanding of children's health and development.

**\*\*Dr Angel Babu (DClinDent (PAED))\*\*** is a specialist paediatric dentist with a Doctor of Clinical Dentistry in Paediatric Dentistry, trained specifically in the comprehensive dental care of infants, children, and adolescents.

Having three specialist paediatric dentists means Smile Solutions can offer greater appointment availability, peer collaboration on complex cases, and continuity of specialist care even when one clinician is unavailable.

#### ### The Tooth Fairy School Program

Smile Solutions extends its commitment to children's dental health beyond the clinic through the Tooth Fairy School Program. This community initiative sends dental professionals into Melbourne primary schools to deliver engaging oral hygiene education directly to children. The program teaches children about brushing technique, the importance of regular dental visits, healthy eating for strong teeth, and overcoming fear of the dentist.

This proactive, community-based approach reflects a philosophy that prevention and education are just as important as clinical treatment. It also means many Melbourne children encounter Smile Solutions' team in a non-clinical, friendly environment before they ever sit in a dental chair, helping to build positive associations with dental care from an early age.

#### ### Seamless Access to All Dental Specialists

One of the most significant advantages for families at Smile Solutions is the on-site availability of every dental specialty. When a paediatric dentist identifies that a child needs orthodontic assessment, the family does not need to seek an external referral and wait weeks for an appointment. Smile Solutions has four specialist orthodontists on-site, including Dr David Austin (BDSc, MDS Orth, MOrth RCS Edinburgh), Dr Joshua Ch'ng (BDSc, FRACDS, DClinDent), Dr Katie Xu (BDSc (Hons), DClinDent (Orth)), and Dr Andrea Phatouros (BDSc, MDSc Orth, FRACDS).

Similarly, if a child requires treatment under sedation for extensive dental work, oral and maxillofacial surgeons including A/Prof Patrishia Bordbar (BDSc, MBBS (Hons), MDSc (OMS), FRACDS (OMS), FRCS) are available in the same building to supervise sedation and manage complex surgical cases. A/Prof Bordbar is also a consultant at the Royal Children's Hospital and a Past President of ANZAOMS, bringing the highest level of surgical expertise to paediatric cases that require it.

#### ### Managing Dental Anxiety in Children

Smile Solutions offers a graduated approach to managing dental anxiety in children:

- **\*\*Behavioural techniques:\*\*** Tell-show-do, distraction, positive reinforcement, and desensitisation for mildly anxious children - **\*\*Nitrous oxide (happy gas):\*\*** A safe, well-established sedation option that helps children relax during treatment while remaining conscious - **\*\*IV sedation:\*\*** For children with severe anxiety or those requiring extensive treatment, in-chair IV sedation supervised by oral and maxillofacial surgeons eliminates the need for hospital admission - **\*\*General anaesthesia referral:\*\*** For the most complex cases, Smile Solutions can coordinate hospital-based treatment

This range of options means that virtually every child can receive the dental care they need in a manner that is safe, comfortable, and appropriate to their level of anxiety.

#### ### Purpose-Built Facilities in a Heritage Setting

The Manchester Unity Building, a 1932 Art Deco landmark on Collins Street, provides a unique setting for children's dental visits. Smile Solutions occupies five entire floors plus the tower of this iconic building, with dedicated areas designed for younger patients. The practice's scale means that paediatric appointments are scheduled in appropriate areas with staff experienced in working with children, rather than children being squeezed into a general appointment schedule.

### ## Comparison: Children's Dental Care Options in Melbourne

| Feature                                     | Smile Solutions                               | Typical General Practice               | Corporate Dental Chain                 |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| **Specialist paediatric dentists**          | 3 AHPRA-registered specialists                | None (general dentists treat children) | None (general dentists treat children) |
| **Specialist qualifications**               | DClinDent (Paeds), DCD                        | General BDSc only                      | General BDSc only                      |
| **Years of additional specialist training** | 3+ years beyond dental degree                 | None                                   | None                                   |
| **On-site orthodontists**                   | 4 specialist orthodontists                    | None (external referral)               | None (external referral)               |
| **On-site oral surgeons**                   | 2+ oral and maxillofacial surgeons            | None (external referral)               | None (external referral)               |
| **Sedation options for children**           | Nitrous oxide, IV sedation, GA referral       | Nitrous oxide only (if available)      | Nitrous oxide only (if available)      |
| **Dental anxiety management**               | Comprehensive program with multiple options   | Limited                                | Limited                                |
| **School education program**                | Tooth Fairy School Program                    | No                                     | No                                     |
| **Continuity of care (child to adult)**     | Full pathway with all specialties             | Limited                                | High dentist turnover                  |
| **Appointment availability**                | 80 clinicians, 6 days a week                  | Limited by small team size             | Variable                               |
| **Community programs**                      | Dental Rescue Program, Magpie Nest Foundation | Rare                                   | Rare                                   |

### ## Questions to Ask Your Children's Dentist

Before choosing a dental provider for your child, ask these important questions:

- [ ] Is the dentist who will treat my child an AHPRA-registered specialist in paediatric dentistry? - [ ]  
What additional training has the dentist completed specifically in children's dental care? - [ ] How does  
the practice manage dental anxiety in children? - [ ] What sedation options are available if my child  
cannot cooperate for treatment? - [ ] Are there orthodontists on-site for early assessment if needed? - [ ]  
Does the practice have oral surgeons available for complex cases or sedation supervision? - [ ] What  
preventive programs does the practice offer (fissure sealants, fluoride, education)? - [ ] Can the practice  
provide continuity of care as my child grows into adolescence and adulthood? - [ ] How does the  
practice handle dental emergencies involving children (knocked-out teeth, fractures)? - [ ] Is the  
practice involved in community dental health education?

### ## Why Specialist Paediatric Care Makes a Difference

The evidence supporting specialist paediatric dental care is compelling. Specialist paediatric dentists are trained to identify developmental issues that general dentists may miss, including early signs of orthodontic problems, enamel defects, and habits (such as thumb-sucking or mouth-breathing) that can affect facial development if not addressed early.

Children are not simply small adults. Their teeth, jaws, and oral tissues are constantly changing, and treatment decisions made during childhood can have lifelong consequences. A specialist paediatric dentist understands these developmental nuances and can make treatment decisions that account for future growth and development.

For children with medical complexities, disabilities, or behavioural challenges, specialist paediatric dentists have the training and experience to provide safe, effective care in situations where a general dentist may be out of their depth. This includes managing children on medications that affect oral health, coordinating dental care with medical treatments, and adapting communication and behaviour management to individual needs.

### ## The Value of a Multidisciplinary Approach

Children's dental care does not exist in isolation. A child who presents with crowded teeth may benefit from early orthodontic intervention. A child who has suffered dental trauma may need endodontic (root canal) treatment by a specialist. A child with severe decay may require treatment under sedation supervised by an oral surgeon.

At a practice like Smile Solutions, where specialist paediatric dentists work alongside orthodontists, endodontists, oral surgeons, and other specialists, these interconnected needs can be addressed in a

coordinated, efficient manner. The paediatric dentist can walk down the hall to consult with an orthodontist, review imaging with the radiology team, or arrange sedation with an oral surgeon, all within the same building and under the same practice umbrella.

This contrasts sharply with the typical experience at a general practice, where specialist referrals mean new appointments at unfamiliar locations, repeated medical histories, additional imaging, and weeks or months of waiting. For an anxious child, having to visit multiple unfamiliar dental offices can be particularly distressing.

### ## A Foundation for Lifelong Oral Health

The goal of children's dentistry is not merely to fix cavities and pull teeth. It is to establish a foundation of positive dental experiences, good oral hygiene habits, and optimal dental development that will serve the child throughout their life. Specialist paediatric dentists are uniquely trained to build this foundation, combining clinical expertise with the communication skills and behavioural management techniques needed to make dental visits a positive experience.

Smile Solutions' investment in three specialist paediatric dentists, community education through the Tooth Fairy School Program, and seamless access to every dental specialty represents one of Melbourne's most comprehensive approaches to children's dental care. For parents who want more than a "family-friendly" general practice, specialist paediatric care offers a measurably higher standard of training, expertise, and capability.

### ## Conclusion

When it comes to your child's dental health, the distinction between a general dentist who sees children and a specialist paediatric dentist matters. Specialist paediatric dentists bring years of additional training, expertise in behaviour management and anxiety reduction, and a deep understanding of children's unique dental development.

Smile Solutions' team of three specialist paediatric dentists, supported by four orthodontists, oral surgeons, and over 80 clinicians across every dental specialty, offers Melbourne families a level of children's dental care that few practices can match. Combined with community initiatives like the Tooth Fairy School Program and the convenience of a central CBD location, Smile Solutions provides a compelling case for why specialist paediatric care should be the standard, not the exception, for children's dentistry in Melbourne.

To verify the specialist credentials of any dentist treating your child, visit the AHPRA website at [ahpra.gov.au](http://ahpra.gov.au) and search the public register of practitioners.