

The primary teeth

The **primary teeth** (baby teeth) are far more important to your child's future dental health than you may imagine.

In addition to providing a proper chewing surface until age 12 or 13, healthy primary teeth form pillars that allow young mouths to develop correctly. Without the primary teeth, the permanent teeth that replace them could not grow into their proper positions in the mouth. The primary teeth help guide the permanent teeth into their final positions. The primary molars are especially important. If a primary molar is lost prematurely and steps are not taken to preserve proper spacing, problems can quickly multiply.

Understanding how teeth normally **erupt** (come in) and what happens when your child loses a tooth prematurely will allow you to see why it's important to help your child establish good oral hygiene habits.

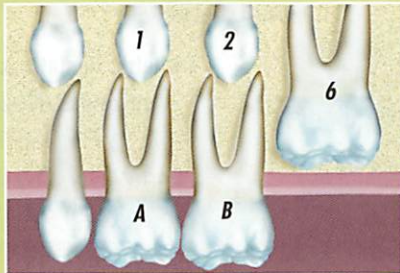
Normal eruption patterns

The same basic eruption pattern occurs in each of the four quadrants of the mouth. As an example, let's follow the development of the upper left side.

Age 4

The primary molars (A and B) have been in their proper positions for two years or more, and the permanent bicuspids (1 and 2) are beginning to form. These teeth will eventually replace the primary molars. The permanent 6-year molar (6) is also in development.

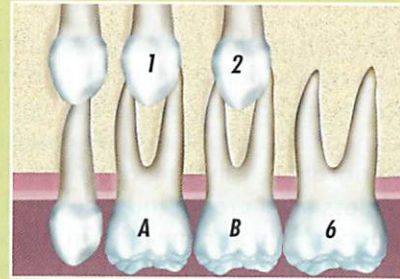
Normal development at age 4.



Age 6

The eruption process is normal so far. The primary molars (A and B) are still helping the child chew and are maintaining space for the permanent bicuspids (1 and 2). These bicuspids are exerting pressure, and the roots of the primary molars are beginning to dissolve (resorb). The permanent 6-year molar (6) has erupted into proper position.

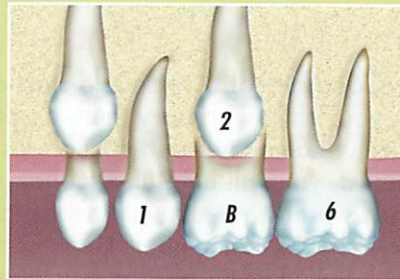
Normal development at age 6.



Age 10

The root structure of the primary first molar has resorbed and the tooth has been shed, creating an eruption path for the first bicuspid (1). The roots of the primary second molar (B) are resorbing normally. Within the next couple of years, it too will be shed.

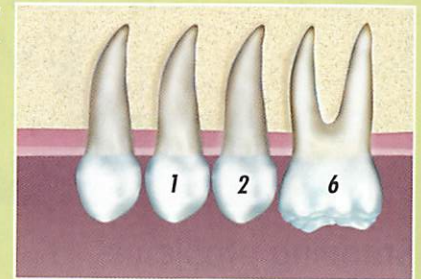
Normal development at age 10.



Age 12-13

By age 12 or 13, the primary molars have served their purpose and are shed. The permanent bicuspids (1 and 2) have replaced the primary molars. This space was maintained by the primary molars. The 6-year molar (6) remains in proper position. This position was stabilized by the presence of the primary molars.

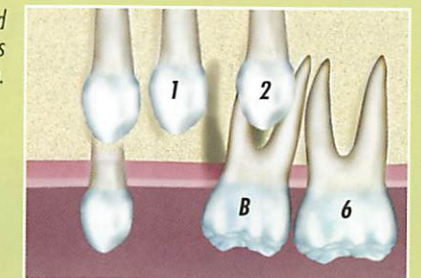
Normal development at age 12-13.



When a tooth is lost prematurely

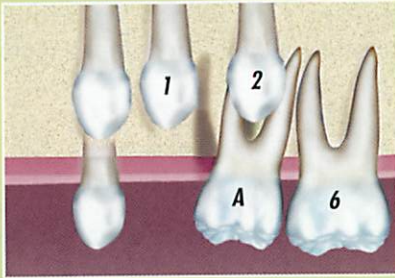
Let's assume that your child's primary first molar (A) is lost prematurely at age 6. Without the stabilizing influence of this tooth, the primary second molar (B) and the permanent 6-year molar (6) begin to move forward. When the space left by the primary first molar is closed, it prevents both permanent bicuspids (1 and 2) from erupting into their proper positions.

Primary second molar moves into space.



In another situation, let's assume that the primary second molar is prematurely lost. With nothing to hold it in position, the permanent 6-year molar (6) migrates forward and closes up the space. Once again, there will not be enough room for both permanent bicuspids (1 and 2) to erupt properly.

Permanent 6 year molar moves into space.



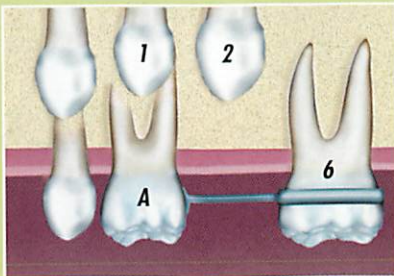
Stopping problems before they develop

The space maintainer

This time let's assume that your child's primary molar is prematurely lost, but a dentist steps in to prevent problems. Treatment is simple, but critical. It requires construction of a space maintainer, an appliance that preserves the space left by the prematurely lost tooth. Later, when it's time for the permanent bicuspids (1 and 2) to erupt, they will have adequate room.

Shown below are lower and upper space maintainers. There are many other variations.

An upper space maintainer.



A lower space maintainer.



The stainless steel crown

Dentists prefer to restore a primary tooth using conventional methods and materials such as filling the tooth. However, when decay or bite problems have caused severe deterioration, other measures such as a stainless steel crown must be used to restore the tooth. When cemented in place, the stainless steel crown forms a protective covering for the tooth.

Why x-rays?

X-rays allow your dentist to see beneath the surface to detect small problems before they become major ones. When detected early, dental problems can be treated with little or no discomfort to your child.

Protecting your child's dental health

Good dental care should start as soon as your child's primary teeth erupt. Through careful home care and regular visits to the dentist, you will help ensure that your child's primary teeth will last as long as they should. Remember: Healthy primary teeth will lead to healthy development of permanent teeth.

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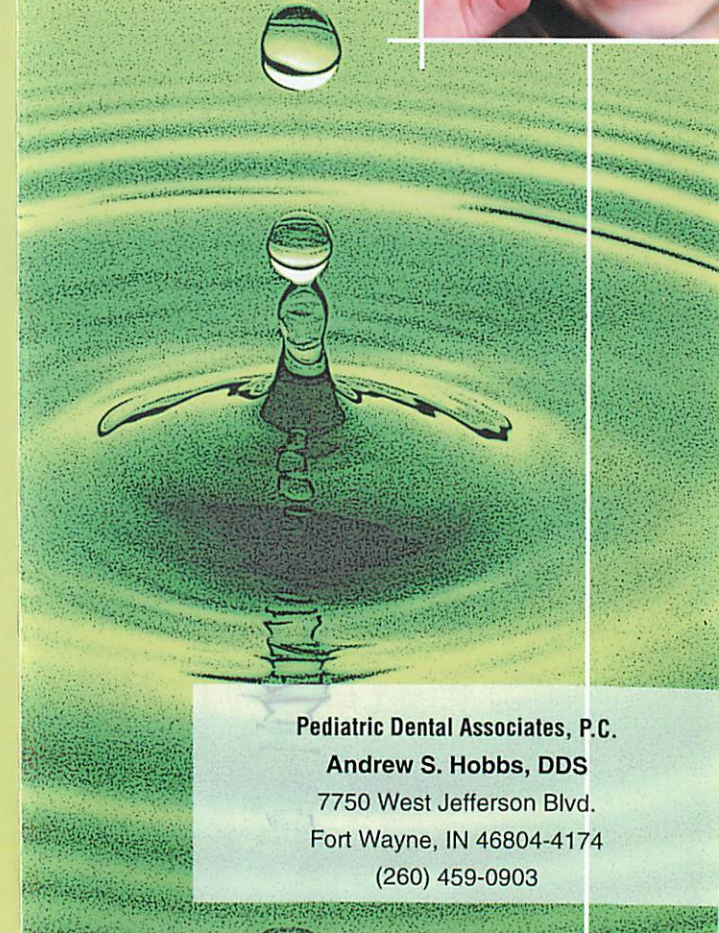
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Primary Teeth

IMPORTANCE and CARE



The primary teeth help to guide the permanent teeth into their final position



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YOUR DENTAL HEALTH