

What to Do if Your Child Has a Loose Tooth

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Do you have any memories of losing your teeth as a child? If so, hopefully, they were good recollections. For parents or grandparents, that time may have been a long time ago, and the experience a little hazy. Regardless, if your precious little one is starting to have loose teeth, will you know how to prepare them for this sometimes scary journey and be adept at handling the situation when it happens?

As an elementary school nurse, mother and grandmother, I have witnessed and sometimes assisted in hundreds of teeth falling out over the years. Some were traumatic due to injury, but most were by the natural process that happens to every child in their primary school years. Read on to find out what you can do if your child has a loose tooth. Hopefully, reading this article helps to take the sting and fear out of the process of a tooth falling out naturally and make it a great experience that your child will remember fondly.



When Do Children Lose Their Baby Teeth?

Children typically have 20 baby teeth, otherwise called primary teeth. According to Mayo Clinic, kids start to lose their baby teeth when they are approximately 6 years old. Typically, they lose their 2 front bottom teeth first followed by the 2 top front teeth. These front 2 teeth are called upper and lower central incisors. As the permanent teeth start to come in, they push on the root of the baby teeth causing them to loosen and fall out.

Children will continue to lose the remainder of their teeth over the next few years, with the molars typically falling out last - between the ages of 9 and 12. The Cleveland Clinic has an excellent chart for reference called the Teeth Eruption Timetable listing all of the teeth and when they should fall out and come back in. (Lori, do you want to put the table in the article?)

What to Do if My Child has a Loose Tooth?

1. Prepare Your Child Emotionally for Loose Teeth Before They Fall Out.

Around the age of 4 or 5, start to talk to your child about teeth starting to get loose and falling out. If your child has a friend or relative who has lost teeth, use this opportunity as a learning experience. Literally, take a tour with your child of this friend's mouth. Point out where the loose tooth is and explain why they fall out. Also, describe the process of how this situation will be handled by you when it happens to your child. If the friend has missing teeth, show your child the hole in the gum line where the tooth used to live. Some parents will talk about the tooth fairy at this juncture and how the child will receive money (or something) in exchange for the lost tooth.

Ensure that you inform your child that the process is painless, although slight bleeding may be involved when a tooth falls out. If your child has had a painless nosebleed (that was not a frightening experience), you can liken that experience to a tooth falling out, stating there was no pain although there was some blood.

2. Social Stories

Social stories are stories used to help children learn about a life situation, especially those that can be difficult. An example would be going to the doctor or dentist for the first time or a hospital stay. By preparing your child for the event in a relatable way, they will be less fearful and better equipped to deal with the situation at hand.

An example of a social story is reading a children's book about loose teeth to a child. A favorite in our family is **Andrew's Loose Tooth** by Robert Munsch, Pete the Cat, and the Lost Tooth, and The Bernstein Bears and the Tooth Fairy. To make the story more relatable, talk with your child throughout the story. Involve your child in the narrative by *asking questions about what they think will happen next and how they would feel or would deal with the situation in the book.*

Another great way to utilize a social story is through videos with content about the process of losing teeth. YouTube provides a fodder of fun, kid-friendly videos about this topic. Once again, talk with your child about the video to make it more relatable and see if they have any questions or fears.

It is advised that you preview the video first to make sure it is suitable for your child. Many videos on the web are related to this subject. However, be careful as some are not produced by experts on the topic. You would want your child to receive accurate and sound information.

Your dentist most likely will have suggestions to help prepare your child also for loose teeth.

3. A Baby Tooth is Loose- Now What?

It is advisable to allow the loose tooth to fall out on its own accord instead of pulling it. This natural process will lessen discomfort, bleeding, and trauma for your child.

Tips to Help a Wiggly Tooth Come Out Naturally

- Have your child "work" the loose tooth with their fingers and tongue. But not to the point of pain or excessive bleeding.

- If the tooth is becoming annoying or your child is anxious to have the tooth come out soon, encourage your child to bite into crunchy, chewy food or an apple. As a school nurse, I witnessed many children's teeth come out at lunchtime with this process. Another food that seemed to dislodge a loose tooth was "gummy" foods that caught the tooth in it. Just make sure that your child doesn't swallow the tooth during this process.
- If the tooth is just dangling and your child is up for a gentle tug, either you or your child can take this next step. You may want to talk to your dentist about rubbing some oral analgesic to the gum area first and giving some pain medication one hour before attempting the gentle pulling of a tooth. Cold popsicles to the site are another way to numb the gum that your child may enjoy.
- It is suggested to use a small square of gauze and your fingers to gently twist and pull the very loose tooth. If it is painful or bleeding a lot, back off. It is not worth the trauma for your child. Go back to the previous 2 steps, and it most likely will come out naturally in the next day or so.

What to Do When the Tooth Does Fall Out

First of all, remember to stay calm and keep your child calm. There may be some bleeding, so reassure your child that this is normal!

- Have your child rinse their mouth with water gently. Cold water will help stop the bleeding faster. If possible, rinse with salt water.
- If still bleeding, you may fold a 3x3 inch piece of gauze and have your child bite down on it for a few minutes until the tooth stops bleeding.
- Avoid chewing on the area where the tooth fell out for several hours.
- Don't panic! Instead, get your child **excited about losing their tooth by how you react to the situation!** If this is the time to remind them about any special traditions that you want to start, like the tooth fairy, draw them into the experience by discussing what happens next with the tooth! Consider taking a picture or a video, calling a relative, or writing a note to their teacher. Losing a tooth is a milestone to remember!

What to Do If You Have Concerns About Your Child's Teeth



According to the American Dental Association, children should have their first visit to the dentist around their first birthday or get their first tooth. So hopefully, by the time your child starts losing their primary teeth, you will have a solid relationship with your child's dentist. If your child is having difficulty with a loose tooth or is late coming out, talk with your dentist. They can offer advice or schedule an appointment for removal, if necessary.

The Take-Away

Regardless of what tradition or experience you want to establish for your child's loose tooth adventure, having a plan ahead of time will lessen the fear for your child. Your preparation will also give you time to make the natural process of teeth coming out a pleasant, well-thought-out memory for all involved. Your personal spin on the event can make a possible frightening situation a fun and exciting one for your child. Here's to hoping that the Tooth Fairy finds her way to your house!

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/childrens-health/expert-answers/baby-teeth/faq-20058532>
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/11179-teeth-eruption-timetable>
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