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### Assessing anxiety in pre-school dental patients with a doll placement test

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**Abstract** The prospect of dental treatment causes many young patients to be anxious and/or afraid. Because it is helpful to know in advance how much anxiety a child is experiencing, we have devised a test in which the child places dolls in a miniature dental office. We used this model to study 48 children, aged three to five years, who visited our paediatric dental office. We prepared a doll-house-sized model of a dental office with a dental chair, a dentist, and dental hygienist. We asked children to place two dolls, one a self-doll and the other a parent/guardian-doll at a location of their choosing in the model clinic. The positions children chose to place the dolls helped us to gauge the anxiety they were experiencing as they anticipated dental treatment. The majority of children we tested were not anxious, and they placed the self-doll in the dental chair. In contrast, we observed that many children who did not place the self-doll on the dental chair were uncooperative during subsequent dental treatment. Thus, our doll-placement test is a valuable predictor of the anxiety of children who will receive dental treatment. Although how children placed the parent/guardian-doll also provided useful information, we gained the most valuable information from whether or not the child put the self-doll on the dental chair.

**Key words** Anxiety, Children, Dental treatment, Doll, Miniature dental office

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