

PATIENT GUIDE

Early treatment for children: what to expect

Why some children start young, what a first phase involves, and why most simply come back later. · 31 Aug 2026

Most children who have a first look at age seven to nine need nothing yet. A few have a bite or jaw pattern that is easier to guide while they are still growing, and for them a short first phase of treatment can make everything that follows simpler. We only recommend it when waiting would make things harder.

When early treatment helps

The reasons are specific rather than cosmetic: a top jaw that is too narrow for the bottom one (a crossbite), front teeth that stick out far enough to be at risk of a knock, a bite that is pushing the jaw sideways as it grows, a habit such as thumb-sucking that is changing the shape of the teeth, or a tooth that is stuck and needs space made for it.

What early treatment does not do is make a second phase unnecessary. Many children who have a first phase still have braces or aligners as teenagers, once all the permanent teeth are through. The first phase makes that second phase shorter, simpler, or kinder to the teeth.

What a first phase involves

A first phase is usually six to twelve months with one appliance: an expander to widen the top jaw, a small plate, or a few braces on the front teeth. Visits are short, and children adapt to appliances faster than adults expect.

After it, we watch. Growth reviews every six to twelve months let us see the permanent teeth come through and decide when, or whether, a second phase is worth doing.

For the child

- We explain everything to them directly, at their level, and they get to ask questions.
- Nothing is fitted on a first visit. There is always a chance to get used to the idea.
- Speech with an appliance sounds different for a few days, then settles.

Common questions

Will baby teeth (primary teeth) be a problem?

No. Early appliances are designed to work alongside them, and in some cases we deliberately wait for a particular one to fall out.

What if we wait?

Often that is exactly what we recommend. If waiting would cost something, such as room for a stuck tooth, we will say so plainly.