

STRAIGHTEN UP!

BY ELIZABETH COSSICK

PHOTOS BY JENNIFER HARRIS

HELPING KIDS FIND THEIR 'REAL SMILES'

If you were to get your hands on my high-school yearbook, first, I might have to kill you. But, second, you would see me in my senior photo, smiling without showing any teeth. I look like I just ate a mouse and am quite smug about it. The reason? I still had braces, which weren't removed until a week before my senior year.

This wasn't unusual 20 years ago – but it would be today. Now, early intervention is the preferred course for orthodontics. According to the American Association of Orthodontics, children should be seen for their first orthodontist check-in at age 7. Yes, 7. Earlier treatment means a better chance at correcting issues before they become permanent, plus less time in braces and less chance for sneaky teeth to slide back into the wrong places after braces are removed.

TRAFFIC JAM ON 285

My son is 9, and he has a couple baby teeth that fell out 10 months ago, with no signs of the permanent teeth descending, yet. So, I set up an appointment with Dr. William Kincer. I'll limit the details about his office – smiley staff, warm environment, wall o' treats to motivate patients – and cut to the facts that could help you as a fellow mama. During our initial (complimentary) consult, Dr. Kincer took an X-ray, made measurements, and gave his official diagnosis: "Bantten's teeth are a traffic jam on 285."

Basically, his teeth haven't erupted because there's no space. So, Bantten is having an expander put in to widen his palate and make more room – a treatment that is best done while the mouth is still developing.

"Seeing children early allows us to address crowding or a narrow jaw, which enables permanent teeth to come in straighter from the get-go," explains Dr. Kincer. "Early intervention also provides a much more stable foundation for teeth as they do come in, meaning less relapse potential after braces."

A ONE-TWO PUNCH

This two-phase approach to orthodontics is much more effective than the old-school way of doing things. For me, I was just put in braces for a million years. For my son, phase one of treatment will involve an expander and first short-term set of braces to get everything set as his mouth develops. Then, phase two will involve a second set of braces to perfect teeth alignment.

And, hear this: two phases does not mean double the money. "Early treatment reduces the need for permanent tooth extractions and reduces the amount of time that children wear a full set of braces," says Dr. Kincer. "Plus, they have a beautiful smile all through those tough adolescent years. We see patients all the time who come in with a closed-mouth smile and then, after treatment, are smiling from ear-to-ear. They find their real smile." Translation? No smug mouse-eaters in the yearbook.



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PRACTICE LIMITED TO ORTHODONTICS



Bantten Cossick, pre-treatment

What about mom?

Record numbers of adults are having orthodontic treatments, according to current statistics. Why so many? "Adult treatment options have improved drastically," says Dr. Kincer. "We have clear aligners and so many other ways to straighten teeth without using traditional braces." So, do adult patients think the new treatments are worth it? Survey says: yes! Ninety-two percent of adults who have completed treatment recommend orthodontic procedures to other adults.