To Save a Tooth (Part 1)...

Our ultimate goal is for every patient to keep every tooth all their life. This is obviously impossible to achieve, but it’s something to aim for, nonetheless.

About the time I was in fifth grade, I had a tooth-to-ground collision with a basketball court. I still remember that dreadful ride to our dentist’s house and then his office, the cell phone not having been invented yet. I also remember that my Dad, the old jock that he was, wanted me to put ice on my tooth. This was his solution to every injury known to man and if you have ever had ice hit an injured tooth, you know how misguided this well meant fatherly advice was. To make a long story short, I lived through the incident, but had two ugly front teeth until my wife graduated dental school. I’d like to think that is why I always had such a hard time with the ladies growing up. At least that’s what I tell myself.

So what do you do when your kid breaks a permanent (adult) tooth? Well, if you are a dentist, there are about a hundred different answers to that question, depending on which tooth and how the tooth breaks. If you are a parent, here’s a quick list of things to do.

*Stay calm* – As in any emergency situation, keep your wits about you. Quit seeing your little girl with a toothless smile on her wedding day and keep things in perspective. The calmer you are, the calmer your child will be. As the old ball coach used to say, “When things go fast, go slow.”

*Look* – Look at the tooth and the piece that broke off (if available). No bleeding is generally a good sign, meaning that the tooth broke superficially. Bleeding from the tooth means that the nerve is exposed and will be very sensitive to hot, cold, and air. Either way, do not put ice on the tooth (see above).

*Medicate* – Get some over the counter pain medication on board. Ibuprofen is best, but Acetaminophen will do. If all else fails, aspirin will work. Do not place the medicine on the tooth. Swallow it as directed.

*Call your dentist* – If your child sees a dentist regularly (another great reason to have routine check-ups), give them a call and tell them what happened. We can usually tell over the phone if we need to see your child right away, or if it can wait until the morning. If you do not have a regular dentist, your best bet will be to get a dental appointment as soon as possible, rather than sitting in the ER just to get a prescription.

Next week, I’ll discuss what to do if your child manages to “knock out” (avulse) a permanent tooth. I know it’s an exciting topic, but try not to hold your breath.

Until next time, keep smiling.

-Questions or comments can be sent to Drs. Parrish at ParrishDental@aol.com.