

Block Scheduling In Pedo and Pedo/Ortho Practices--Better Service, Less Stress, More Production

Block scheduling is defined as “scheduling like treatment together as closely as possible”. An art, not a science, block scheduling means better, more efficient service for patients, increased production, and decreased stress for the doctor and staff. With block scheduling ideal days can be the norm, not the exception. Most pediatric dental and orthodontic practices handle a large volume of patients so that block scheduling is particularly helpful. Multiple chairs and several clinical auxiliaries allow a faster pace so that six, seven or more columns may be scheduled simultaneously.

To facilitate block scheduling, list the types of appointments seen in your office. In pediatric dentistry, the list might read: new exams, recares, sealants, pre-meds, heavy and light restorative, ortho (impressions, appliance deliveries, etc.) and a category I jokingly call “ticky-tackies”, short but necessary appointments such as post-ops, trauma checks, suture removals, quick extractions, second opinions, appliance checks, and look-sees. In orthodontic offices, one might list: new exams, records, consults, separators, band and bonds, checks/adjustments, debands, and retainer checks. Count the number of patients seen in each category for at least three months and calculate the average amount of time dedicated daily or weekly to each type. Then decide the best time of day or days in the week for scheduling each category i.e.; construct an ideal day and week.

The following block pattern is a pediatric example to be edited to meet your scheduling needs and preferences. Orthodontic scheduling can be patterned similarly using blocks of time for the variety of ortho procedures. These templates show longer appointments for heavy treatment early in the morning followed by lighter treatment with short appointments before lunch. Afternoons are dedicated to recares, sealants, ortho checks, and non-restorative appointments. In pedo, one afternoon weekly can be scheduled with light restorative mixed with recares on older children.

Example of Pediatric Dental Practice Block Scheduling

Note: an arrow indicates multiple chairs scheduled

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00	premed or 3-4U tx	same as Mon. a.m.	new exams	same as Mon. a.m. or	same as Mon. a.m. or all recares
9:00	↓	↓	↓	Wed. a.m. or ortho B&B's, debandings, records, etc.	or hospital
10:00	2-3 U tx	↓	3-4U tx	↓	or admin. time for Dr. and spic & span time for staff
11:00	↓	↓	2-3U tx	↓	
12:00	appl. del or other light tx. emergs, post-ops, look-sees. appl. cks, suture removals, etc.	↓	emergs, post-ops, look-sees, appl. cks, suture removals, etc.	↓	OFFICE CLOSED
1:00	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	
2:00	new exams (4+/hr. with sufficient staff and chairs)	new exams	recare/sealants/ ortho cks	new exams	
3:00	recares/ sealants/ortho cks	recares/ sealants/ortho cks	↓	teen afternoon tx & recares	
4:00	↓	↓	↓	↓	
4:30	ortho cons	↓	↓	ortho cons	
5:00		↓	↓		

- R = recare, a preferred term for the periodic prophylaxis and examination.
- Recares can be scheduled throughout the day; 1 column when treatment is being done simultaneously and multiple recare columns in the afternoons.
- 5 y.o.'s and below in AM's only, except new exams.
- Block teens (11 y.o. +) on Thurs. PM's. Teens enjoy having other teens in the office.
- 1 or 2 AM's/ month for special patients -- begin at 8 AM.
- Infant Oral Health Program -- "Toddler Time" -- scheduled occasionally.
- Emergencies -- relieve pain and reschedule. Trauma cases worked in as necessary.

If full-banded orthodontics is offered in the pediatric dental office, these procedures can also be block scheduled. Depending on the volume of ortho patients, lengthy ortho can be booked one or two mornings weekly, with monthly wire change appointments mixed with recares every afternoon. In short, it is preferable to mix pedo and ortho appointments, recares and wire changes, only in the after-school hours, with pedo only booked on some mornings, and ortho only on others.

If patient flow demands that some orthodontic procedures be done during all-pedo time, then be selective about the type of ortho appointments interjected. Records can be scheduled on non-ortho days if a well-trained staff member takes records (dentist will be busy with pediatric procedures on non-ortho days). Ortho consultations can be blocked on non-ortho days if placed where they do not interfere with pedo. Procedures such as separators, evaluation of expansion patients, or headgear adjustments, can be scheduled during "ticky-tacky" time ("t.t.'s" are quick, necessary, but non-fee producing appointments just before 1 p.m. lunch).

**Example of Orthodontic Scheduling in a
Pedo-Ortho Combined Practice**

DAY	TIME	
Monday or Wednesday	8 - 9 a.m.	one unit emergencies, recares and observations
	9 - 11 a.m.	band and bond appointments
	11 a.m. - 1 p.m.	partial bandings or debandings
	2 - 5 p.m.	routine wire changes or retention recalls with pedo recares

DAY	TIME	
Tuesday or Thursday	8 - 9 a.m.	one unit emergencies, recares and observations
	9 - 12 p.m.	routine wire changes or band and bond appointments
	12 p.m. - 1 p.m.	consults, records, or exams
	2 - 5 p.m.	routine wire changes & other two-unit appointments mixed with pedo recares

Remember the dentist and entire staff must be committed to the concept of block scheduling in order for it to work. Staff members must develop verbal skills for convincing parents and patients that it is to their advantage to come at certain times on certain days. Phrases such as: "Years of experience have taught us children do best when restorations are done in the morning."; "We save special time for our new patients so that the entire staff is available to welcome you and your child, to answer your questions, and to make your child feel very comfortable this first visit."; "We save afternoons for six month recare appointments for school age children so that they miss as few school classes as possible." help sell parents on certain appointment times. Remember also that only the scheduling coordinator (or a back up when he/she is out) makes appointments. Offer a patient the choice of two appointment times only, available on alternate days for specific types of appointments; then offer two more, etc., until the appointment is chosen. This gives the parent a sense of being in control without their actually dictating when they will bring their child. Never say, "When do you want to come?"

Block scheduling lessens stress, improves production, and allows the doctor and staff to better serve patients, the ultimate goal of every system in the practice.