

# Best Practices and Proven Scripts to **Reduce Broken Appointments**



## 15 Best Practices to Reduce Broken Appointments

1. Implement a cancellation fee that gets donated to charity (\$25-\$50).
2. Train the team on persuasive scripting.
3. Implement this script for broken appointment reduction and practice at a weekly admin team meeting.
4. Track cancellations by reason using dummy adjustment codes in the ledger to monitor trends (provider, type, location, reason).
5. Incentivize the scheduling team on “saved appointments” or to reduce the cancellation rate.
6. Start confirming appointments and doing insurance verification no less than a week in advance. Confirm via text, email, and phone call. In confirmations, include cancellation policy (see script in #14).
7. Any appointments that are unconfirmed 3 days out (because you’ve already called, texted, and emailed) get bumped into an overflow column to open up space for new patients or ASAP list patients.
8. Require deposits for large appointments.
9. For treatment appointments, never tie a payment to an appointment. Instead, set up their payment plan for auto-pay, a date separate from their appointment date.
10. Open up capacity for new patients: use new patient schedule blocks during prime times.
11. For new patients, schedule within 72 hours of their call.
12. For new patients, have the provider call and welcome them to the office using the **New Patient Welcome Call script**.
13. Experiment with overbooking using a “ghost” column; add 1 appointment in the morning and 1 in the afternoon so that when cancellations happen, you can slide those appointments in.
14. Every time you schedule or confirm an appointment, inform the patient of the cancellation policy with this script: “If you need to make any changes to your appointment, will you let us know 2 days in advance so we can offer the time to someone else? (wait for them to say yes). Awesome thank you, that way you can avoid the cancellation fee. But the good news is the fee goes to charity.”  
  
*Practice this script at a weekly admin team meeting until you know it by heart.*
15. Have a brief weekly admin team meeting for change management updates, scorecard review, and quick practice role play of one or two of the office’s scripts and SOPs. Repetition creates mastery, what’s measured, gets improved, and where your focus goes, energy flows.



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## Broken Appointment Script

**Patient:** "Hi, I'd like to cancel my appointment today/tomorrow."

**You:** "Oh no, is everything ok?"

**Patient:** "Yes, I just \_\_\_\_\_ (non-emergent excuse\*)."

**You:** "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Is there anything I can do to help you keep this appointment? I could move it earlier or later in the day—It's just, at this late notice, I won't be able to offer it to anyone else, and there's usually a \$50 donation to charity if you reschedule with less than 48 hours' notice unless there's an emergency." Stay quiet while patient thinks it over or objects.

"Here's what I can do for you, if you can reschedule any other time today or tomorrow I can waive the charge for you. When would you be able to come in?"

*Attempt to reschedule patient to another time slot that day or the following day. If successful...*

**You:** "Thank you so much, I really appreciate you working with me."

*If patient hasn't broken an appointment before and can't keep appointment or reschedule in the next 24 hours...*

**You:** "I'm looking at your appointment history, and I see that this is the first time you've had to reschedule short notice, so I can go ahead and reduce the cancellation donation to \$25. Would you prefer St. Jude's Children's Hospital or the ASPCA? And would you like the card on file ending in XXXX or is there another one you'd like to use?"

*If patient has broken an appointment within the last 2 years and can't keep appointment or reschedule in the next 24 hours...*

**You:** "I'm looking at your appointment history, and we actually had a short notice cancellation for you on \_\_\_\_\_ (date), however we waived the fee for you. There will be a charge of \$50 today, but the good news is it gets donated to charity. Do you prefer St. Jude's Children's Hospital, or the ASPCA? And would you like the card on file ending in XXXX or is there another one you'd like to use?"

**Patient:** "Yes I just \_\_\_\_\_ (emergent excuse)"

*If emergent excuse (death of a loved one, illness, suspected exposure to COVID-19) see below.*

**You:** "Oh I'm so sorry to hear that. Of course, I can certainly help you reschedule. Would 2 weeks or 4 weeks from now be better?"

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If patient says I'll call you back, ask if you can follow up with them in 2 weeks or 4 weeks and leave a note for yourself to do so. Then send a handwritten note of sympathy to remind patient that we are here and we care about them.



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## New Patient Welcome Call (Doctor)

### Voicemail:

Hi, this is Dr. \_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ Dentistry.

I'm calling to introduce myself and to personally welcome you to the practice.

I see you have an appointment coming up for your first visit with us on: \_\_\_\_\_ (date) at \_\_\_\_ (time)

I'd like to remind you we're located at \_\_\_\_\_ (location). Your hygienist's name is \_\_\_\_\_ .  
We are both looking forward to meeting you and giving you an excellent experience.

Have a great day and see you soon.

### Directly:

Hi, this is Dr. \_ from \_\_\_\_ Dentistry, I'm calling for \_\_\_\_

I'm calling to introduce myself and to personally welcome you to the practice.

I see you have an appointment coming up for your first visit with us on \_\_\_\_\_

I'd like to know if you have any special requests or concerns for your visit so we can be prepared to serve you better when you arrive at your appointment.

- If it's hygiene, ask about forwarding of X-rays, etc, if it's problem-focused, ascertain the nature of the problem and note it in the appointment
- Confirm location of the office

Goodbye.



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