

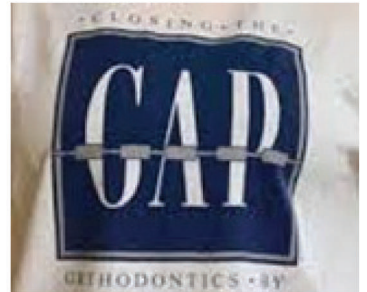
CLOSING THE GAP

BY DR ELIYAHU SIMCHA GHERMAN



While attending The American Association of Orthodontics annual meeting in California, I spotted some great T-shirts for my daughters. They had The Gap logo, some braces, and said "Closing the Gap".

This referred to closing spaces that patients often have between their teeth. A week later, I realized the great panic I had caused, when many of our friends wondered why their teenage girls were pressuring them to get to the malls quickly before The Gap stores closed down!



WHAT CAUSES PEOPLE TO HAVE SPACES BETWEEN THEIR TEETH?

Genetics is often the main reason. Such as having a large jaw with small teeth, missing teeth from birth, a large tongue that pushes the teeth apart or a strong muscle between your lip and gum called a frenum, can cause a space. Other reasons can include bad oral habits or bone loss.

SHOULD ALL SPACES BE CLOSED?

Once, I treated a patient for a bad bite. The least of his problems was a space he had between his front teeth. Towards the end of his treatment, as part of the finishing touches, I closed the space between his front teeth. After handing him the mirror, he did not look overly happy so I asked him if there was anything wrong with his smile. "No," he said, "It looks great, Doc, but can I have my space back?" He explained that the space was a family trait, considered a sign of "royalty". I calmed him down by explaining that the same way that I closed the space I could re-open it, and that the space would stay in his family for generations to come.

Often, in a young child, there are spaces that are normal and should stay open. Some spaces that are due to missing teeth will also need to stay open, and often widened to allow the dentist

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to restore the space with the properly-sized implant or bridge. However, most large spaces that are not due to missing teeth, should be closed.

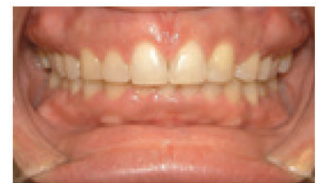
While, as presented above, a small space could certainly stay open for cultural reasons, adults come to close spaces largely for aesthetic or social reasons. A study by Dr. H. Kerosuo in the European Journal of Orthodontics found that people with significant spacing between their front teeth were perceived to be less intelligent and of a lower social status, when compared to the same individuals once the space was closed.

Closing spaces, however, is not just for aesthetics. Large spaces can block other teeth from coming into the mouth, prevent the forces on the teeth from distributing properly, and cause collapse of those teeth that are unsupported. Closing large spaces can also help to reform new bone.

Here are two examples:



Laura: Before After



Nicole: Before After

In both cases the space was so large that it was decided to close nearly all the space, and then add bonding material to the side teeth to give a more esthetic result and prevent the spaces from re-opening.

If you have been hesitant to get braces because you are self-conscious, now might be the perfect time to get braces - you are wearing a mask anyway!

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