Dental Health Services

Toothbrushing in Child Care Centres

A guide for Child Care Centre Staff
Contents

Why brush teeth in Child Care Centres? 3
Getting started 5
Before brushing 6
When to begin mouth care 7
How to brush the teeth 8
Helpful hints 9
Hygiene 10
Sample letter to parents 11
The health of a child’s mouth is vital to their overall health and wellbeing.

Baby teeth are important for many reasons such as eating, speaking, smiling and to maintain the space for the new adult teeth.

Child carers have an important role to play in promoting oral health and encouraging good habits from an early age.

The following information will assist you in introducing a Toothbrushing Programme in your centre.

**Why brush teeth in Child Care Centres?**

Toothbrushing is important to remove plaque, which is a soft, sticky, almost invisible layer of bacteria that forms on teeth everyday. Plaque cannot be removed by rinsing or chewing fibrous foods. The belief that eating an apple or carrot can replace toothbrushing is an ‘old wives tale’. Brushing plaque from the teeth each day using a fluoride toothpaste helps prevent tooth decay and gum disease.
Children should be encouraged to brush their own teeth from an early age. However, it is difficult for young children to brush properly because they do not develop adequate dexterity until they are about 8 years old. Therefore, young children will require an adult to assist with and supervise their brushing.

It is also important to brush because:

- children may not be brushing at home, especially if both parents work. Sometimes the only time children brush their teeth is at the child care centre.
- good dental habits developed at an early age will be carried through to adulthood.
- children learn basic hygiene principles and develop toothbrushing skills by brushing their own teeth.
Getting started

Obtaining the right equipment

A request can be made to parents to provide the required equipment or the centre may purchase and allow for this expenditure in the parents’ fees (see sample letter on back page).

Toothbrushes

A toothbrush with a small head and soft bristles should be used to allow good access to all areas of the mouth.

Toothpaste

Low-strength fluoride toothpaste should be used for children under six years of age and normal-strength toothpaste for older children. Colgate Junior, Macleans Milk Teeth and some Oral B children’s toothpastes are suitable low fluoride toothpastes.

Plastic plate

If children do not have their own tube of toothpaste, a large plastic plate can be used to dispense the toothpaste around the edge. Using a plate can reduce cost.

Toothbrush container, cover or plastic mug

If using a covered container or cover, it must be ventilated. If the container is not ventilated, a few small air holes should be made in the plastic.

If using a plastic mug, ensure the toothbrush is placed head up when stored, not in contact with other children’s toothbrushes and kept out of reach of children.
Before brushing

- Ensure all toothbrushes, containers and mugs are clearly labelled.

- Select a suitable time. Teeth should be brushed once a day at the childcare centre. The best time for this is after their midday meal, before they have their afternoon nap. However, if this time is not practical, then select a time that best suits your centre. Any time is better than no time.

- For hygiene purposes, it is essential that staff and children wash their hands prior to handling any equipment. Staff should wear gloves when brushing children’s teeth.

- It is important that an adult be in charge of dispensing the toothpaste. No more than a pea-sized amount of toothpaste should be used and toothpaste tubes must not be shared. If the children do not have their own tube, place toothpaste around the edge of a plastic plate so it can be wiped up with each child’s brush. This will prevent cross contamination. Toothpaste must be stored out of reach of children.

- An adult should assist and supervise younger children when brushing. Children must be discouraged from swallowing toothpaste.
When to begin mouth care

Mouth care should begin even before the teeth erupt. A baby’s gums can be wiped with a clean damp cloth after each feed.

Tooth cleaning should start as soon as the first tooth appears in the mouth (approximately 6 months of age). At first, a moistened soft cloth may be used to gently wipe the teeth and gums.

When just a few teeth are present a toothbrush can be introduced. For children up to 17 months of age, no toothpaste should be used when brushing their teeth. For children 18 months to 5 years use a small pea-sized amount of low flouride toothpaste and for children over 6 years of age, a normal strength toothpaste. Children should spit out, not swallow and not rinse after brushing.
How to brush the teeth

Brush by placing the tip of the bristles towards the gum line and gently ‘jigging’ the brush, or moving it in tiny circles over the teeth and gums. Repeat the same brushing method on the inside surfaces of all teeth. For the chewing surfaces, use a light backward and forward motion. Remember, plaque is soft, so there is no need to scrub.
Helpful hints

- Make toothbrushing a positive experience for the child. When helping, brush gently and make it fun.

- Make up a Toothbrushing Chart to record daily brushing, for example with a star, tick or stamp. For good efforts, provide practical or healthy rewards once the chart is full, such as weekly or monthly.

- Choose a position where you can easily see inside the child’s mouth. For example, standing or sitting slightly behind and to the side of the child, with the head supported and tilted back slightly.
Hygiene

The storage of toothbrushes is critical to ensure that there is no cross infection.

Cleaning toothbrushes after use

Toothbrushes should be thoroughly rinsed after each use to remove debris then air dried. Bacteria can grow on wet toothbrushes so they must be dry before being replaced in their container or cup.

The container/cup must be scrubbed, cleaned and dried on a regular basis.

Disinfecting contaminated toothbrushes

If toothbrushes become contaminated in any way, for example, used by another child, they ideally should be replaced with a new brush. If this is not practical, then they should be decontaminated as per the infection control policy in place in your centre.

Remember....

- Good oral health practices in child care centres provide valuable and ongoing benefits to children, carers and families.
- By encouraging young children to brush regularly, you will be helping them to keep their teeth for a life-time!
Sample letter to parents

The following is a sample letter to assist you in notifying parents about the Toothbrushing Programme and your efforts to promote dental health.

Dear Parent/Carer

This centre acknowledges that the health of a child’s mouth is vital to their overall health and wellbeing. Baby teeth are important for eating, speaking, smiling and to maintain the space for the adult teeth.

To help prevent tooth decay, daily toothbrushing and healthy eating habits should begin at an early age.

(Name of centre) can play an important part in your child’s dental health and will be introducing a Toothbrushing Programme to promote strong healthy teeth.

As part of the Programme, toothbrushing will be carried out once a day at this centre and we hope that this will be supported with your help at home.

Enter your choice of options:

1. A list of items if parents are requested to provide equipment

2. A small fee will be charged to cover costs of purchasing equipment

By encouraging young children to brush regularly, you will be helping them to keep their teeth for a life-time.

If you have any queries we would be happy to discuss those matters with you.
Contact the Dental Health Education Unit
for further information on
9313 0604 or 9313 0605
or email dheu@dental.health.wa.gov.au
Alternatively visit www.dental.wa.gov.au