

Oral Health in the Classroom



Explore oral health through activities, free play, and conversations.

Talking Teeth, All Day Long!

Healthy teeth help us smile, talk, and eat. This means we have lots of “teachable moments” throughout the day to recognize and reinforce the importance of healthy teeth.

Circle Time

- Read tooth-related books. A list of great books is available in the Tips & Materials library.
- Have a dance party to Raffi’s song, “Brush Your Teeth.”
- Lead children in pretending to brush a giant’s teeth! They’ll have to stand on their tip toes to brush the giant’s top teeth, reach their arms out in front to get to the back teeth, and reach down to brush the bottom teeth!

Centers & Activities

- **Dentist Office Center** Include props like a doctor’s coat, toothbrushes, a chair/cot for patients, a hand mirror or mouth mirror, a mouth model, dolls (to be patients), and a clipboard for making notes on patients’ “charts.”
- **Mouth Collage** Cut out mouths from magazines and lead children in making a collage. Look at the artwork and talk with children about all of the things that our mouths help us do (talk, smile, laugh, sing, eat, drink). Then, talk about what we do to keep our mouths healthy (brushing with fluoride toothpaste, eating healthy foods, not eating too many sugary foods, going to the dentist).
- **Happy Tooth, Sad Tooth Sorting Activity** Collect play foods or pictures of foods. Make a poster with a smiling tooth on one side and a frowning tooth on the other, or use those labels on two buckets. Talk with children about what foods are good for our teeth (fruits, vegetables, calcium foods, water) and what foods are not (sugary foods, sticky candy, sugary drinks). Sort the play foods/pictures into “happy tooth” and “sad tooth” foods.

Make a Mouth!

Cut the bottom off a plastic drink bottle. Paint it white on the inside. You can make multiple teeth and hot glue them, cut-side down, to a cardboard or foam core “mouth.” Or, for a water-proof version, glue a single “tooth” to a red plastic plate.



Photo from:
<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/18577417191837808/>

Activity Idea: Give children toothbrushes and water. Smear a bit of paint on the outside of the tooth (sugar left on the teeth from soda or candy) and ask children to brush it clean.



Mealtimes

Our teeth help us chew food, and some foods can actually help our teeth. Make mealtimes “teachable moments” with these conversation starters:



- “Crunchy [*fruits/vegetables*] like these [*apple slices, carrot sticks, celery sticks*] are good for our bodies and our teeth. What are other crunchy [*fruits/vegetables*] do you like?”
- “You need strong teeth to bite those crunchy [*apple slices, carrot sticks, celery sticks*] don’t you?!” That’s why we brush our teeth every day with fluoride toothpaste.
- “[*Oranges, tomatoes, broccoli*] have lots of vitamin C which helps keep our skin and gums healthy.”
- “[*Milk, yogurt, cheese*] has calcium in it, which helps our bones and teeth grow strong.”
- “Drinking water is not only good for our bodies, it makes our teeth happy by washing food out of our mouths.”

You are so important to young children and their families. Supporting children’s oral health will help them build healthy habits for life. Families look to you for your expertise and support.

Pick-Up Time

Talk with families about children’s oral health when you see them at the end of the day. If you brush infants’ and toddlers’ teeth, you may notice when new teeth are coming in and other changes. You can also let families know when infants get used to brushing and don’t fuss as much. An easy way to strike up a conversation with any family is to say, “[Child’s name] did a great job with brushing today! Look at that smile!”

Brushing Time

Use these tips to make group brushing fun for preschoolers, and keep children on task:

- Ask children to “Open wide like a lion,” or let them pick the animal of the day.
- Set a timer for two minutes to help you and the children know how long brushing will last.
- Have mirrors available so children can watch themselves and find hard-to-reach teeth.
- Sing a song to pass the time and remind children to brush all sides of all of their teeth.



Brush Your Teeth

(Sung to: “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”)



Brush your [*front top*] teeth

Get them nice and clean



Scrub the fronts and scrub the backs

Until they sparkle and gleam!

Repeat for bottom, side, and back teeth

Give children “constructive praise” when brushing than tells them what they are doing well.

- For infants and toddlers, you might say, “Great job keeping your mouth open. That helps me brush your teeth!”
- For preschoolers, you might say, “Great job brushing your back teeth!”, “Great job spitting in your cup.” or whatever other behaviors you’d like to reinforce.

Resources Used When Creating This Document

Boyer-Chu, L. 2007. [Health & Safety in the Child Care Setting: Promoting Children’s Oral Health, A curriculum for health professionals and child care providers](#). California Childcare Health Program.

Stewart, DJ. (February 28, 2012). [Toothbrush water play in preschool](#)

American Dental Association. 2017. [Nutrition: What You Eat Affects Your Teeth](#), [Decay](#), [Fluoride](#).

