

Brushing Teeth

Information for young people, parents and carers

Getting ready

- Use calming and regulating ideas before and after the task of washing and bathing to support keeping the child in a 'just right' state.
- Consider the time of day; can tooth brushing happen at a calmer time of the day, eg; not when you are rushing around getting ready for nursery or school?
- Think about bathroom temperature, lighting levels and try to minimize any background noises e.g. bathroom fans.
- Increase body awareness before brushing: apply gentle pressure to the cheeks using both hands; blow up cheeks and gently squash flat.
- Play tongue games or invite the child to complete tactile input to the mouth area before brushing e.g. count teeth on left side with tongue, can they push their cheek out with their tongue, or drum fingers up and down lips whilst humming etc.

During toothbrushing

- Ensure the child is in a stable position – avoid small platform stools where the child will be concentrating on their balance. Can they sit down instead?
- Position your child in front of a mirror so that they can use their vision to help them.
- Practice with a flannel and/or a finger on the teeth.

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- Consider finger toothbrushes that require no toothpaste.
- Experiment with different toothbrushes: electric, hard bristles, soft bristles, large head, small head etc. The vibrations of an electric brush can be calming.
- Consider using mild flavor or flavor-less toothpaste. Use minimal toothpaste until the tolerance improves.
- Facilitate independence in children with fine motor difficulties by using a toothpaste pump dispenser and a thicker handled brush.
- Consider using plaque staining tablets to offer more visual feedback to the child on where they need to brush to remove it. Model this first.
- A variety of electric toothbrushes now come with the ability to play music to children for the duration of brushing and some include a light that will turn on if the child is brushing too hard.
- Use a sand timer or Smart timer to help countdown the brushing time.
- For children and young people with demand avoidance, try and incorporate choice, fun and novelty ideas. You may need to change these regularly.
- Please visit our resources section for information on buying any of the items that we have talked about in this advice sheet

Scan the QR code to find more support for children and young people with sensory processing differences



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