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## Taking Care of Baby Teeth Curriculum

### Session 1: Guest Dentist and What You Can Do at Home

Objective 1: Parents increase their knowledge of the importance of baby teeth to children's dental health and overall health, and how to minimize risk of caries.

Activity 1: "Learning About Baby Teeth"

Discussion of primary dental development, the caries process, and caries prevention by regular tooth brushing. Session provided by a community-based dentist with time for question and answers.

Objective 2: Parents learn from each other about reasons to begin child tooth brushing and how to carry out this activity at home.

Activity 2: "What You Can do at Home"

Presentation of educational materials, supplies, and suggestions to help parents begin or continue twice daily tooth brushing led by dentist and the parent educator

### Sessions 1 - 4 Essential Activity: Educational Materials and Supplies to Support Tooth Brushing at Home *This activity occurs at the end of every session.*

Objective 1: Parents have parent-recommended materials and supplies readily available, and at no cost, to take home and try with their children.

Educational Materials: Photo cards showing how to brush the teeth of children at different ages, a photo card of healthy and unhealthy teeth, a brochure "Caring for children's teeth."

Supplies: Children's and adults' toothbrushes, children's toothpaste with fluoride, adults' toothpaste, infant tooth gel without fluoride

Ways to Make Brushing Fun: "Does a Lion Brush?" story book, two-minute timer, tooth brushing song sheets

### Sessions 2 - 4 Essential Activity: "What's Working, Not Working, and What to Do About It" *This activity occurs first in the schedule before any educational activity.*

Objective 1: Parents share with each other what worked and didn't work with regard to tooth brushing in the prior week and offer suggestions to help each other problem-solve.

Activity 1: "What's Working, Not Working, and What to Do About It"

Parents discuss tips and tools they tried in the past week, the results, and modifications or new strategies they developed; discussion facilitated by the parent educator.

**Session 2 Add-On Activities: Games (Dental Crossword, Sugar Game), How to Brush**

Objective 1: Oral health knowledge and behaviors are reinforced through games.

Activity 1: "Dental Crossword and the Sugar Game"

Parents and parent educator complete and discuss the information contained in a dental crossword puzzle and play a game of guessing the sugar content (as expressed in sugar packets) in common beverages.

Objective 2: Parents learn recommended tooth brushing techniques for children of different ages and practice brushing.

Activity 2: "How to Brush a Young Child's Teeth"

Parents practice brushing the teeth of a puppet (Ollie Z. Mutt, a 17-inch plush dog puppet available for purchase from [smilecare.starsmilez.com](http://smilecare.starsmilez.com)) showing the others "how-to" with a child the same age as their own. Parents are coached by the parent educator.

**Session 3 Add-On Activities: What Happens at School, the Tooth Brushing Song and a Picture Book**

Objective 1: Parents learn how tooth brushing and dental knowledge is supported in their child's education program; compare how home and school practices are alike and different.

Activity 1: "Taking Care at School"

Description of the dental health component of the childhood education programs. Discussion of how school and home practices differ and what the child is learning and practicing in each setting; led by parent educator.

Activity 2: “The Tooth Brushing Song”

Parents learn songs used in their child’s early childhood education program to encourage tooth brushing and a tooth brushing song-like chant (“When you wake up in the morning ...”)

Objective 2: Parents discuss additional ways of making tooth brushing fun for their child.

Activity 3: “Does a Lion Brush?”

Parents take turns reading pages of a dental-related child’s picture book and talk about how to read it with their children and their child’s reaction.

**Session 4 Add-On Activity: Timed Brushing with Child or Ollie-the-Dog**

Objective 1: Parents demonstrate adequate brushing technique and duration for child’s age

Activity 1: “Brusha-brusha-brusha”

Parent brushes her child’s teeth, is timed, and receives praise and corrective feedback as needed from the parent educator. If the child is unwilling, the parent practices using Ollie-the Dog.

## **Examples of “Taking Care of Baby Teeth” Sessions from Diary Notes of Actual Sessions**

### **Session 1: Guest Dentist**

Our guest dentist arrived and gave an informal presentation that included tooth development, prevention of dental caries, dietary impacts on dental health and a tooth brushing demonstration with Ollie dog. There was time for questions and a discussion of dental exams. Then, an interesting turn of events ensued. When the dentist finished her presentation, she said, “OK, guys, I could use some advice.” She told us about her firstborn son, now a little over a year old, who is strongly resisting and clenching his teeth when she attempts to brush his teeth. She has been attempting to hold him down as he kicks and screams, and has had little success. She said that was quite exasperated because here she is, a dentist, and nothing is working to motivate her own child to brush his teeth! Compassion, understanding, support sprang forth from our group, along with suggestions to back off on brushing for a short while in order to avoid the pattern of power struggles that had developed. Since there are no older siblings, cousins or friends to role model, we suggested that she and her husband engage in fun tooth-brushing sessions, in which they make a show of modeling brushing with each other and talking with each other about their tooth brushing, sing tooth brushing songs, etc., in front of him, without including him, then after several days, to invite him to join in the fun and to imitate their behavior. We gave her a copy of the “Who Brushes?” picture book and a flashing toothbrush to take home to her son.

### **Essential Activity: What Works? (included in all sessions)**

When asked, “What worked?” Parents offered the following in lively discussion:

- One mom said that she was really grateful for this gathering and though she had thought she was “well educated”, until last week she did not realize the importance of brushing her child’s teeth (a two year old) twice a day.
- One set of parents related that they had begun to brush their reluctant toddler’s teeth while watching his favorite TV show, as the dentist had suggested, and that he now lies down and opens his mouth when the show comes on, expecting to have his teeth brushed.
- One dad described the flashing toothbrush as “magic” for getting their son to brush his teeth for a longer period of time than previously. He reports that they are now brushing twice a day, instead of once.
- Another parent noted that using a favorite TV show as a tool of distraction while brushing her child’s teeth had been a success.
- Parents agreed that their children pay no attention to the wall chart at this age (2-3), and are mostly motivated by imitating behavior, distraction or reward of TV and playing games.

### **Session 2: Sugar Game**

Because of the concern of a teacher about a mom using orange pop for her baby, I brought in a can of orange soda, a container of chocolate milk, and a bottle of orange juice. I had the parents do a brief label-reading activity to determine the number of teaspoons of sugar per

serving of each product. Most were surprised at the sugar contents, and this promoted discussion about how to prevent sugars from remaining in the mouth, even after healthy foods and juices, and distinguishing the difference between juices and non-nutritive drinks.

### **Session 3: Tooth Brushing Songs and a Story Book**

The topic of priority for today was, of course, stories of the season's flood damages and concerns about how each family was coping with their own specific situation. The mood of was subdued and somber, distinctly different than our previous meetings, which were light-hearted and fun. One of our moms, whose home is in the worst-flooded area, had major damage, and was not able to attend. Another mom told her story of long days of hauling out soaked, ruined belongings, ripping out toxic, mud-caked carpeting and furniture, even removing all of their kitchen cabinets to get to the wet sheetrock, which will be cut out and replaced.

In the list of priorities of life in our county this week, tooth brushing seemed like it might be pretty far down the list. But amazingly, the moms were still taking it seriously, and were attentive to the information that was shared tonight. I was touched by their concern for each other, and by the sense of peace and purpose that settled over our group as we circled up to talk about children and their well-being. Singing the tooth brushing songs and reading the picture book together was not only an activity that provided tools of motivation for establishing positive dental habits in children, it proved to be an opportunity to connect, to laugh and be light-hearted together, and maybe even offered something "normal" in the midst of a chaotic situation.

### **Session 4: Timed Brushing with Child, or Ollie**

One little (3-year old) boy is quite shy, says very little, and has taken quite a long time each evening to warm up to us. I was quite surprised when, after we had gathered up our supplies to leave, he came up to me and asked if he could brush Ollie's teeth! I filled Ollie's spit bottle and grabbed the stopwatch. He then proceeded to brush Ollie's teeth seriously, first the back, one side, then the other and then said "Teeth together!", and went diligently after the front teeth. This was so amazing and cute, watching him interact with Ollie (and knowing exactly what he was doing!) after taking all these weeks to warm up and even speak to us! Ollie did a fabulous job of spitting, which made everyone crack up and we all were exhilarated that we ended on such a fine note!