



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Health

Brush Up on Oral Health



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- **Case Management**
- **Case Management Focusing on Oral Health**
- **Including Oral Health in Case Management**
- **Cook's Corner: Corn and Black Bean Salad**

Did You Know?

Head Start directors, staff, and parents report that some of their biggest challenges are:

- Finding oral health care for children
- Making sure children get the oral health preventive and treatment services they need

Case Management



Case management is an important service provided by Head Start programs that is usually done by health managers, family service workers, and home visitors. As case managers, Head Start staff help parents find and use the health and social services their child needs to be healthy. Case management should be tailored to the family because each family has different strengths and challenges.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* explains how case management can be used to improve the oral health of Head Start participants. It also describes how case managers and parents work together to meet children's oral health needs.

Case Management Focusing on Oral Health

Listed below are examples of case management focusing on oral health:

- Educating parents about oral health and its importance to overall health.
- Improving parents' problem-solving and self-management skills (for example, helping a mother overcome her fear about going to the dentist).

- Helping parents navigate the oral health care system (for example, helping a father enroll his child in Medicaid or other insurance programs and find an oral health provider).
- Linking parents to other resources in the community that can help meet their child's oral health needs.
- Advocating for Head Start participants to make sure that oral health providers offer high-quality, culturally and linguistically competent care.

Including Oral Health in Case Management

Many Head Start programs include oral health in their case-management efforts. For those that don't include it or that include it only partially, here are some ways to work oral health into the process:



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- **Assessment.** To decide whether case management is needed, Head Start staff determine (1) if the child has a dental home, (2) if the child has had an oral examination within the past year, (3) if the child needs treatment, and (4) if an existing treatment plan is completed. If a child does not have a dental home or oral health services have not been received or completed, case management services are needed.
- **Education and Planning.** When case management is needed, the case manager can talk to parents about the importance of oral health, regular dental visits, and follow-up treatment. The case manager can also find out what barriers exist that keep parents from meeting their child's oral health needs. Then, the case manager and parents can work together to make an oral health care plan for the child.
- **Assistance and Care Coordination.** Once an oral health care plan is agreed on, the case manager can help parents overcome barriers to making the plan work. Having good relationships and a referral system with oral health providers in the community is key. Examples of assistance and care coordination include helping parents find oral health providers, make dental appointments, and sign up for insurance or other resources that can help pay for care. The case manager can also help arrange transportation to dental appointments. And they can remind parents about their child's appointments.
- **Tracking and Evaluation.** Tracking and evaluation lets the case manager track whether a child's oral health care plan is being followed. The case manager can also ask parents and oral health providers about the quality of their Head Start oral health experience and if their expectations are being met. This allows the case manager to find out how well the process is working and if the child's oral health needs are being met.

For more information about working with families and about case-management strategies, see [Tools to Strengthen Families and Communities: A Compendium](#).

Cook's Corner: Corn and Black Bean Salad

Here's a delicious healthy snack that children can make as a class project or at home with their families.

Ingredients

1 15-oz. can black beans	2 tablespoons lemon juice
2 cups frozen corn kernels, thawed	¼ teaspoon salt
1 red pepper, chopped	¼ teaspoon ground pepper
2–3 tablespoons red onion, finely chopped	2 tablespoons cilantro, finely chopped
¼ teaspoon garlic, finely chopped	⅛ teaspoon chili powder
3 tablespoons olive oil	

Directions

1. Put black beans, corn, red pepper, red onion, and garlic in a large bowl.
2. Put olive oil and lemon juice in a small bowl and mix well with a fork or whisk. Pour over black beans, corn, red pepper, red onion, and garlic mixture.
3. Season with salt and pepper. Add cilantro and chili powder.
4. Mix well and serve.



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Note: For safety, an adult should chop the ingredients.

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Read all issues of *Brush Up on Oral Health* at [Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center](#).

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