



Brush Up on Oral Health

July 2016

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Did You Know?

- Because parents are children's first teachers, they are powerful role models.
- Children of parents who value, reinforce, and model healthy oral health habits are more likely to have good oral health and overall health.



Engaging Parents in Their Child's Oral Health

Head Start health services are based on the premise that a child must be healthy to be ready to learn. Parents' involvement in their child's oral health is key to the child's overall health and well-being. Parents who introduce, reinforce, and model good oral health behaviors and attitudes pass them on to their children.

This issue of ***Brush Up on Oral Health*** describes why it is important for parents to be engaged in their child's oral health. It includes strategies and resources Head Start staff can use to engage parents in their child's oral health. A recipe for a healthy snack that can be made in a Head Start classroom or at home is also included.

Why Engaging Parents in Their Child's Oral Health Is Important

If parents brush a child's teeth with fluoride toothpaste every morning and before bedtime, the child is more likely to continue that behavior into adulthood. In the same way, if parents give their child healthy foods that are good for the teeth, the child is more likely to eat healthy foods as an adult. Also, if parents take their child for dental visits regularly, the child is more likely to seek oral health care as an adult.

Head Start staff can work with parents throughout the program year to help improve their child's oral health. Some ways that staff can do this are:

- Ask parents about their experience taking their child for a dental visit. Discuss any issues or concerns.
- Invite parents to show how they brush their child's teeth, including how much toothpaste they put on the toothbrush. Reinforce good practices and offer suggestions, as needed.
- Suggest that parents make simple, healthy snacks for their child using **Cook's Corner: Recipes for Healthy Snacks** ([English](#), [Spanish](#)), a collection of recipes from past issues of *Brush Up on Oral Health*.
- Encourage parents to model good oral health habits at home, like brushing their own teeth with fluoride toothpaste twice a day and eating healthy foods.

Strategies and Resources to Help Head Start Staff Engage Parents

Positive relationships between parents and Head Start staff are important for engaging parents in their child's oral health. Useful strategies and resources for improving relationships and working with parents include:

- **Build partnerships.** The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement's [Building Partnerships: Guide to Developing Relationships with Families](#) offers tools and strategies to help Head Start staff develop positive, ongoing, and goal-oriented relationships with parents.
- **Use motivational interviewing.** This involves carefully listening to parents and involving them in setting goals and making decisions. The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness offers examples of how to use [motivational interviewing strategies](#). These examples can help Head Start staff integrate motivational interviewing into conversations with parents. The [November 2014](#) issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* and [Discussing Oral Health with Parents of Children Who Have Dental Cavities](#) offer communication techniques that are based on motivational interviewing.
- **Provide case management.** This is an approach where Head Start health managers and family service coordinators work with parents to find and access oral health care. The [November 2013](#) issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* describes how case management can improve children's oral health. The issue also discusses how case managers can work with parents.
- **Increase parents' oral health knowledge and improve their ability to navigate the oral health care system.** Parents who understand the importance of oral health and who



are comfortable talking to oral health professionals are more engaged in their child's oral health. The New Jersey Head Start Association's [***A Guide for Improving Children's Oral Health Care: Tools for the Head Start Community***](#) is a toolkit developed to help Head Start staff improve parents' health literacy and ability to work with their child's oral health professionals. Section III offers role-play and workshop strategies for engaging parents in their child's oral health.

Cook's Corner: Cucumber Bites

Here is a delicious healthy snack that children can make in a Head Start classroom or at home with their families.

Makes 6–8 servings

Ingredients

- 1 cucumber, sliced into ½ inch rounds
- ¼ red, green, or yellow bell pepper, chopped fine
- 4 ounces of light cream cheese (at room temperature)
- ½ tablespoon of powdered ranch dressing



Directions

1. Mix the cream cheese and ranch dressing.
2. Spread the cream cheese mixture onto the cucumber slices.
3. Sprinkle the bell pepper pieces over the cream cheese mixture.

Safety Tip: An adult should slice the ingredients.

Contact Us

The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback on this newsletter issue, as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to health@ecetta.info or call 866-763-6481.

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School readiness begins with health!



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