



Brush Up on Oral Health

October 2016

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Did You Know?

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

- Finding oral health care for children
- Making sure children receive the oral health care services they need

Case Management in Head Start



Case management is an important service provided by Head Start programs that is usually done by health and family service managers, family service workers, and home visitors. As case managers, Head Start staff can help parents find and access the health and social services their children need to be healthy. Case management is tailored to meet each family's strengths and challenges.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* defines case management and explains how it can improve the oral health of children enrolled in Head Start. It also describes how case managers and parents can work together to meet children's oral health needs. A recipe for a healthy snack that can be made in a Head Start classroom or at home is also included.

Case Management Defined

Case management is a process where case managers and parents work together to identify and overcome barriers to accessing health and social services. These barriers can include family belief systems and practices, health literacy challenges, and anxieties or phobias. Other barriers can include difficulty locating and accessing health care, no insurance coverage, and a lack of or unreliable transportation.

Using case management as it relates to health services, Head Start case managers can work to:

- Enhance parents' problem-solving and self-management skills
- Help parents navigate the health care system

- Establish parents' role as caretakers of their child's health
- Build on and use parents' personal resources to overcome the unique challenges they face in accessing health care
- Promote the use of evidence-based care

Using Case Management to Improve Children's Oral Health

Oral health can easily be included in case-management efforts. Some case-management services can include:

- **Assessment.** To decide if case management is needed, Head Start staff determine the following:
 - If the child has a continuous source of oral health care
 - If the child has had an oral exam in the past year
 - If the child needs oral health treatment
 - If the child's treatment plan was completed



Case management may be needed if the child does not have a continuous source of oral health care, has not had an oral exam within the timeframe stated in the state [Early Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment](#) (EPSDT) guidelines, or needs oral health treatment.

- **Education and planning.** When working with families, the case manager can have a conversation with parents about the importance of oral health, regular dental visits, and follow-up treatment. Together, the case manager and parents can identify barriers that prevent the child from receiving needed oral health care. Then the case manager and parents can work together to make a plan for ensuring that the child receives the oral health care he or she needs.
- **Assistance and care coordination.** Once a plan is agreed upon, the case manager can help parents overcome barriers to make the plan work. Assistance and care-coordination services may include helping parents find oral health providers, arranging appointments, and enrolling children in health insurance plans or identifying other resources that can help pay for care. The case manager can also arrange transportation to dental appointments and remind parents to keep their child's appointments.
- **Tracking and evaluation.** Tracking and evaluation lets the case manager determine whether the plan for making sure the child receives the oral health care he or she needs is being followed. This allows the case manager to find out how well the process is working and if the child's oral health care needs are being met.

For more information about case management and family support tools, see [National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement](#).

Cook's Corner: Mummy Toast

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

Ingredients

- 1 slice whole wheat bread, toasted
- 6–8 pieces low-fat cheese, sliced into thin strips
- 1 tablespoon pizza sauce with no added sugar
- 1 black olive, sliced

Directions

1. Spread the pizza sauce over the toasted bread slice.
2. Arrange the cheese on top of the pizza sauce.
3. Put the black olives on top of the pizza sauce for the eyes.
4. Put the mummy toast under the broiler to melt the cheese.

Makes 1 serving

Safety tip: An adult should slice ingredients, and, to prevent burns, young children should not use an oven or stove.

Contact Us

The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback on this 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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