



Steps for Toothbrushing at the Table: Growing Healthy Smiles in Early Care and Education Programs

Ms. Marshall: Hello, friends. Are you all ready to brush your teeth? Ms. Marshall is going to put some toothpaste in the cups, because we're going to do what, Rose and Elizabeth? We're going to brush our teeth.

Dr. Mark Macek: Head start and other early childhood programs are excellent places to help children learn good health habits. As programs staff, you play an important role in helping children develop healthy habits. Welcome, my name is Dr. Mark Macek with the University of Maryland School of Dentistry.

Having good oral health has a positive impact on a child's ability to learn, and is key to growth and development. But not all children have good oral health. Children with pain and infection from tooth decay may experience more difficulty concentrating and learning than children with healthy mouths. And they may also miss more school days.

Did you know that tooth decay is a disease caused by bacteria and is nearly 100% preventable? Or as I like to say, tooth decay is preventable, not inevitable. Brushing the teeth every day with fluoride toothpaste is an important part of preventing tooth decay. Fluoride in toothpaste when used daily attacks bacteria that cause tooth decay and strengthens teeth.

By teaching good oral health habits now, you help a child develop skills that can last a lifetime. Today, we're going to introduce a toothbrushing approach that is done with children and staff seated at the table. Toothbrushing at the table is a great group learning activity.

It allows for teachable moments where staff can model, coach, and encourage good toothbrushing skills. Plus, it's less messy and time consuming than having children brush one at a time at the sink. There are three steps, get ready. Gather supplies for each child, a soft-bristled child-size toothbrush clearly labeled with child's name, a small cup, a paper towel, toothpaste with fluoride, a toothbrush holder with at least two inches of space between slots so that toothbrushes do not touch each other.

The next step is to get set, clean the table. For children ages three and older, use a small pea-size amount of fluoride toothpaste on the rim of each cup. Set a paper towel and small cup in each child's place. Have children sit in their seat. Have each child take their toothbrush. The third step is go.

Each child scoops the toothpaste off the cup onto their toothbrush. A staff member coaches children to brush making small circles or using a gentle scrubbing technique. For brushing, start with the outer surfaces of the top and bottom teeth. Next, brush the inside of surfaces of the top and the bottom teeth. Next, brush the chewing surfaces of the top and bottom teeth.

And last, they clean their tongues with the tooth brush using a sweeping motion. Children spit any extra toothpaste into their cups. No rinsing is needed because the small amount of fluoride toothpaste remaining in the mouth will have more time to soak into the outer layers of the teeth. Children wipe their mouths with their paper towels, and place the paper towels in their cups.

Ms. Marshall: And we're going to smile. Show off your pretty teeth. Smile to your friends. Make sure everybody sees your teeth. Show all your friends. Yes, they're so shiny. Good job. Are you going to stand?

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Children rinse the toothbrushes one at a time at the sink, and then place the toothbrushes in the holder to dry. Children should wash their hands. The staff should clean the table.

The most challenging was getting them to actually brush their teeth instead of just putting the tooth brush in their mouth and chewing on it. Taking it to wash and actually washing each tooth was the challenge that we had at the beginning. We are able to do it as a group, and I'm able to make sure that they're getting all of their teeth when they're brushing. With them being one on one doing it at the sink, you're not right there to see them do it, and you're also not there to model it with them, as well.

Dr. Macek: As program staff, you play a key role in helping children develop healthy habits that can last a lifetime, and the classroom table is an excellent place for children to practice brushing