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Introduction

Children, especially those under age 3 and from low-income families, often do not see a dentist. Early Childhood Caries (ECC) are a form of dental decay that affects this group, sometimes with alarming consequences. Infants and toddlers with dental decay are more likely to later have other decayed primary and permanent teeth. Some young children with ECC may be severely underweight because of dental pain that affects their eating. Other health and service systems interact with the families of young children who are at risk for ECC. Through *Help Me Smile*, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) hopes to enable those systems to help prevent ECC and to avert its most severe consequences through early dental intervention.

In Ohio, the statewide systems that see the children are the Help Me Grow home visiting program, the Child and Family Health Services Program and the Women, Infants and Children Supplemental Nutrition Program. In addition, other home visiting programs such as those using community health workers have contact with significant numbers of pregnant women, new mothers, infants, young children, school age children, adolescences and their families. Prior to this initiative, the programs in these systems lacked protocols and training that focused on oral health-related anticipatory guidance and identification of at-risk mothers and children.

The purpose of this initiative is to develop high quality educational materials and protocols for use by lay and professional non-dental health workers in systems that see at-risk children. By training these workers, we hope to enhance their ability to **educate** at-risk populations about healthy behaviors and lower the risk of dental problems; **identify** those with the greatest need to see a dentist and; **connect** them with a dental home for diagnosis and treatment.

The model contained in this curriculum for worker training uses age-specific assessment tools to identify risk and to target anticipatory guidance (lessons, units, handouts) and follow-up. ODH continues to work with others towards increasing the number of dental care resources for children, without which identification of at-risk children would not be effective.

Instructions for the Help Me Smile Curriculum

The use of the assessment tools, curriculum, flip cards and handouts are all interrelated. The assessment tools screen six age groups: Adult/Caregiver, Infants 0-11 Months, Toddlers 12–35 Months, Early Childhood 3–5 Years, School Age 6-10 Years and Adolescences 11-21 Years. Each question on the assessment, depending on the clients' response, denotes whether the client is at-high or low-risk for oral health problems.

The home visitor completes only the assessment for the age groups that represent that family. Each age group assessment has a corresponding color-coded age group unit in the curriculum lessons, activities and handouts to address the problem. If the family

member is at-risk in any areas based on their response to the assessment, the home visitor will know which activity to do with the family to address this problem.

The home visitor also has flip cards of each of the lessons in the curriculum. These are short talking points, the home visitor can use with the family in the home. Included in the flip cards are instructions on “lift the lip” with colored pictures of oral problems to be recognized for dental referral.

DENTAL HEALTH CURRICULUM

Adult to 21 years old

Standards:

1. Families will develop an understanding of the importance of “lift the lip” in their families’ dental health.
2. Caregivers will develop an understanding of the importance of being positive dental role models.
3. Families will develop an understanding of good oral health.
4. Families will develop an understanding of good oral health nutrition.
5. Families will develop an understanding of the processes of establishing and maintaining a dental home.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Adult/Caregiver

Unit: Fluoride in Drinking Water/Alternate Source of Fluoride	1
Unit: Cigarettes and Smokeless Tobacco	4
Unit: Nutrition During Pregnancy	7
Unit: Snacks and Drinks	10
Unit: Teeth Cleaning	15
Unit: Your Dental Home	19
Unit: Bad Breath, Bleeding Gums and Toothache	23
Unit: Observation Adult	27
Unit: Observation Prenatal	32

Infancy 0-11 Months

Unit: Fluoride in Drinking Water/Alternate Source of Fluoride	1
Unit: Gum/Teeth Cleaning Techniques	4
Unit: Early Childhood Caries	7
Unit: Sharing Germs	10
Unit: Your Dental Home	12
Unit: Dental Injuries	16
Unit: Lift the Lip: Infancy 0-11 Months	19

Toddler 12-35 Months

Unit: Fluoride in Drinking Water/Alternate Source of Fluoride	1
Unit: Teeth Cleaning – Toddler 12-35 Months	4
Unit: Early Childhood Caries	8
Unit: Sharing Germs	11
Unit: Snacks and Drinks – Toddler 12-35 Months	13
Unit: Medication/Serious Health Problems	18
Unit: Your Dental Home	20
Unit: Dental Injuries	24
Unit: Lift the Lip: Toddler 12-35 Months	27

Early Childhood 3-5 Years

Unit: Fluoride in Drinking Water/Alternate Source of Fluoride	6
Unit: Teeth Cleaning – Early Childhood 3-5 Years	9
Unit: Sharing Germs	13
Unit: Snacks and Drinks – Early Childhood 3-5 Years	15
Unit: Medications/Serious Health Problems	21
Unit: Your Dental Home	23
Unit: Dental Injuries	27
Unit: Lift the Lip: Early Childhood 3-5 Years	30

School Age 6-10 Years

Unit: Fluoride in Drinking Water/Alternate Source of Fluoride	1
Unit: Snacks and Drinks	4
Unit: Medications/Serious Health Problems	10
Unit: Teeth Cleaning	12
Unit: Your Dental Home	16
Unit: Bad Breath, Bleeding Gums and Toothache	20
Unit: Dental Sealants	24
Unit: Dental Injuries	26
Unit: Mouthguards	29
Unit: Observation School Age 6-10 Years	32

Adolescence Age 11-21 Years

Unit: Fluoride in Drinking Water/Alternate Source of Fluoride	1
Unit: Snacks and Drinks	4
Unit: Teeth Cleaning	9
Unit: Your Dental Home	13
Unit: Dental Sealants	17
Unit: Mouthguards	19
Unit: Bad Breath, Bleeding Gums and Toothache	22
Unit: Cigarettes and Smokeless Tobacco	26
Unit: Oral Piercings	29
Unit: Observation Adolescence Age 11-21 Years	31