



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Health



Brush Up on Oral Health

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Did You Know?

- **Children with Disabilities: Helping Parents Find a Dental Clinic and Speak with the Dental Team**
 - **Helping Parents Find a Dental Clinic**
 - **Helping Parents Speak with the Dental Team**
 - **Cook's Corner: Cream Cheesy Cucumber Bites**
- Pediatric dentists are specialists that complete two years of training after they finish dental school.
 - Most pediatric dentists know how to work with young children with disabilities.
 - Most children with disabilities can receive care from their family's general dentist.



Children with Disabilities: Helping Parents Find a Dental Clinic and Speak with the Dental Team

Children with disabilities need good oral health to be healthy. Finding a dental clinic that is willing to see a child with disabilities can be difficult for parents. It also can be hard to find a dental team that knows how to work with children with disabilities.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* offers tips that Head Start staff can share with parents to help them find a dental clinic for their child with disabilities. The issue also includes tips to share with parents about how to speak with the dental team. A recipe for a healthy snack that can be made in the Head Start classroom or at home is also included.

Helping Parents Find a Dental Clinic

Head Start staff, health managers, dental consultants, and dental hygienist liaisons may know local dentists who have successfully treated children with disabilities. They may be able to help parents set up a dental appointment for their child. In addition, staff can encourage parents to:

- **Establish dental benefits.** If the child is eligible for Medicaid but not enrolled, direct parents to the federal government's InsureKidsNow.gov **Programs in Your State** webpage.

The site has a description of every state's Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) as well as program applications.

- **Talk with other parents.** Parents of children with disabilities have experience and information that can help other parents. They can share information on how to choose a dentist. They may also be able to share the name of a dental clinic that successfully treated their child.
- **Contact the child's doctor or community groups and organizations.** The child's doctor and community groups and organizations that serve people with disabilities may know of dental clinics that treat children with disabilities. For example, [Family Voices](#) has a network of state offices that may be able to help locate local dental clinics.
- **Search local, professional, and government directories.** Pediatric dentists can be found in local telephone, dental association, and government directories. Some state health departments or professional associations may have directories of dental clinics that serve children with disabilities. For example, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry's [Find a Pediatric Dentist](#) directory and InsureKidsNow.gov's [Find a Dentist for Your Kid](#) widget have lists of pediatric dentists who provide care to children with disabilities.

Helping Parents Speak with the Dental Team

Here are tips that Head Start staff can give parents for speaking with the dental team once they find a dental clinic for their child with disabilities.

- **Clearly describe the child's oral health needs.** Explain to parents that when they speak with the clinic receptionist, they need to clearly describe the child's oral health needs. For example, parents can tell the receptionist that the child needs a cleaning and a check-up, or that the child has a toothache.
- **Share information about the child.** Remind parents to fill out dental clinic forms before the child's visit. Let parents know that it is important to answer all questions on the form, including questions about the child's health history. The answers help the dental team get to know the child and be ready to meet the child's needs. If the dental team does not ask parents to complete a form before the dental visit, Head Start staff can encourage parents to ask for one.

Encourage parents to be honest about the child's oral health experiences. If the child has had difficult dental visits, hearing about that from parents will help the dental team prepare for the child's visit. It will also give parents and the dental team a chance to discuss what will happen during the visit. For example, the dental team may say that even though they will try their best to keep the child calm, some children cry, and this is normal.



- **Encourage parents to share information about the best ways to work with their child.** Parents know their child best. For example, the parent may say, “My child has autism and will cooperate if you go slowly.”
- **Ask to be in the room while the child receives care.** Encourage parents to ask if they can be in the room while the child receives care. Parents can make suggestions or show the dental team ways to manage and comfort the child, if needed.

Cook’s Corner: Cream Cheesy Cucumber Bites

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

Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons low-fat cream cheese, at room temperature
- 2 pieces whole wheat bread
- ¼ cucumber, cut into thin slices

Directions

1. Spread cream cheese on one side of bread.
2. Place cucumber slices over cream cheese on one slice of bread.
3. Put one side of bread, cream-cheese side down, on top of cucumbers.
4. Cut sandwich into bite-sized pieces.

Safety tip: An adult should slice ingredients.



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