



Dear Head Start Parent:

As part of our lessons on dental health, your child has been taught why the teeth need to be cleaned every day. Now the children are learning how to clean the teeth. We have given your child a toothbrush to use in the classroom. You will want to make sure your child has a toothbrush to use at home, too. Here are some tips on brushing your child's teeth.

Children of Head Start age can begin to learn to brush their own teeth. An adult must help, however, to see that they are brushing well. Get a small child-size brush and soft, polished bristles. A hard-bristled brush can hurt your child's teeth and gums. When using toothpaste, be sure it contains fluoride. Only a dab, the size of a pea, is necessary. If you don't have toothpaste, encourage your child to use the toothbrush by itself. Replace the brush when the bristles look bent, usually every three or four months. A worn out toothbrush cannot clean teeth and may hurt your child's gums.

There are a number of good ways of brushing the teeth. Here's the brushing method your child has learned in Head Start:

- * Hold the brush against the gum line. Point the bristles toward the gums.
- * Move the brush back and forth with short half-a-tooth-wide strokes, using a gentle scrubbing motion.
- * Brush the outside surfaces of the teeth, the inside surfaces, then the chewing surfaces.
- * To clean the inside surfaces of the front teeth, tilt the brush straight up. Make several up-and-down strokes with the front part of the brush.

In addition to brushing, be sure to use dental floss in order to remove plaque (an invisible layer of germs) from between the teeth. However, young children should not floss by themselves; have your dentist or dental hygienist show you how to floss your teeth and your child's teeth. By flossing your teeth you will be presenting a good example for your child to follow.

To encourage your child to brush his or her teeth, you can put up the chart we have provided showing the days of the week. Every day that the child brushes, draw or paste a brightly colored star on the chart. It is a good idea to brush your teeth along with your children. If your child cannot brush his or her own teeth, you may want to hold your child on your lap while helping brush his or her teeth.

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When not in use, brushes should be left uncovered so that the air can dry them. When toothbrushes are put away, be sure that the brush heads are placed so that they do not touch or drip on each other. To prevent spreading germs, each family member should have his or her own brush. By helping your child develop good dental habits today, you help your child have good health tomorrow.

Sincerely,

Lori L. Brewer, LPN

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Head Start Health Services Specialist