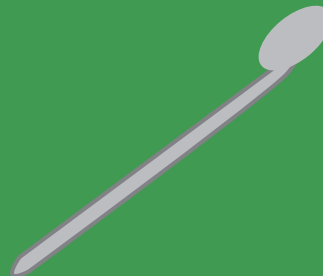


Teaching Dentistry to Special Needs Children

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Teaching Dentistry to Special Needs Children

AN ORAL HEALTH DISCUSSION GUIDE

Teaching special needs children about the dentist and having optimal oral health can be a lot of fun and extremely rewarding. Providing this information can require adaptation of information we use every day, but with patience and helpful techniques will be very well received.

Keep in mind, special needs children may often have communication barriers. For individuals with limited language skills, use pictures or objects to help explain what will occur. Simple language and “tell-show-do” will be a great way to convey information and prepare the child for a positive dental visit.

Probably the easiest way to teach dentistry to special needs children is to do it in a smaller group setting and breaking up the presentation into three parts.

- Learning about and visiting the dentist
- The importance of brushing and how to brush
- Good Food vs. Bad Food — teaching them how to make good food choices

Helpful Materials

Dental lab coat

Mask, gloves, glasses

Dental tools (actual size) — mouth mirror, explorer, prophy angle

Dental tools (large size) — toothbrush, mouth mirror

Large mouth model

Plastic food items or photos of food e.g., fruits, vegetables, milk, water, cheese, cookies, soda, candy

Introduction

- Greet the children and let them know today they’re going to talk about their smile.
- Ask them to show their biggest smile.
- Praise them and let them know smiling is fun and means you’re happy. Keeping a happy smile is easy and today we are going to learn the three most important ways to keep a happy smile.

Learning About and Visiting the Dentist

The Dentist

- Dentists are very nice doctors who know a lot about our teeth and mouths.
- When you visit the dentist two times each year the dentist uses small tools to check your teeth to see if they are strong and to see if they're growing the right way. (Show the small tools — mouth mirror and explorer)
- If teeth are not healthy or if they're not growing in the right way, the dentist can fix them during a different time by using special pastes or with other special tools.
- When speaking about the dentist you can put on a dental lab coat, mask, gloves or take a child volunteer and dress them up like a dentist. When fully dressed as a dentist, allow the children to feel the coat, gloves and touch the mask.
- Have them look at dental tools and if they wish, carefully have them hold the tools and touch their fingernails gently with the tooth counter, explorer, and pretend they're opening for the mouth mirror. You can also use the bigger mouth mirror and the large mouth model to show how the dentist uses the mirror.

Teaching the importance of brushing and how to brush

Use the large mouth model, toothbrush and mouth mirror.

Importance of brushing

- Just like keeping your body clean by taking a bath every night and brushing your hair to keep it neat, brushing your teeth is very important because it keeps your teeth clean.
- Brushing is fun and we must brush our teeth at least two times each day. When we wake up and before bedtime.

Method

- It's best to think of teeth as having sides. For the back teeth we have the outside, the inside and the tops. For the front teeth we have the outside and the inside.
- We also break up the mouth into three parts: the top teeth, the bottom teeth and the tongue.
- Remembering to clean your tongue is also important since many germs can hide on our tongues. Have the children stick out their tongue (also demonstrate for them) and gently pretend to brush their tongues.
- Again let them see, feel and hold the large toothbrush and brush the large mouth model teeth instructing them as mentioned.

Good Foods vs. Bad Foods

Eating healthy food is not only important for your body, but also very important for your teeth. Healthy foods help them become big and strong, while sticky, sugary foods make them feel bad and weak.

- If the children are capable, ask them if they'd like to play a game called Good Foods and Bad Foods.
- One by one show them a food item and ask them to raise their hand if they think the food is good and will make their teeth strong and happy, or if the food is bad and will make their teeth weak and sad.
- Once finished with a few items, show a collage or photo of the Good Foods: fruits, vegetables, milk, cheese, water etc. Then, show the Bad Foods: candy, soda, cookies, etc.

Explain that it's better to eat more Good Foods than Bad Foods because Bad Foods are sticky and have a lot of sugar, but when having a treat of one of the Bad Foods the best way to make your teeth feel better is to rinse them with water and/or brush your teeth.

Conclusion

It's very important to keep our teeth healthy and strong! Today we learned about the three easy ways to we can do that.

- Visit the dentist two times each year.
- Brush and clean your teeth, mouth and tongue two times a day, in the morning and at bedtime.
- Last, make sure to eat more Good Foods than Bad Foods and if you do eat a bad food as a treat, please brush your teeth or rinse your mouth with water.

Special Activities

- Show the children photos of other children going to the dentist.
- Let them observe their sibling at a dental visit.
- Have them visit a dental office and meet the dentist and staff.
- Have them sit in the chair and use a soft toothbrush or prophylaxis angle on their hands to let them feel and touch.