Happy Teeth philosophy

A child’s oral health is greatly influenced by the habits and behaviours adopted in the early years. In a toothbrushing study investigating improvements in oral health from daily brushing at primary school, children whose parents reported they rarely brushed were found most likely to have experienced tooth decay. High sugar and fruit juice consumption were also shown to be associated with high rates of tooth decay.

Toothbrushing is only one strategy for improving oral health. To successfully improve oral health, it is essential to promote good nutrition and increase knowledge of good oral hygiene practice.

We have learned that, unlike plaque on our teeth, one-off or infrequent messages about oral hygiene simply don’t stick!

With these things in mind, to achieve success, health education programs must be:

- implemented by staff who are early childhood specialists
- supported by each facility’s policies and routines.

This new approach doesn’t mean dental professionals aren’t important. It just means that health professionals and early childhood staff need to work together to make sure that tooth-friendly policies and routines are regular features of early childhood care.

It’s about partnership

Happy Teeth was developed by early childhood specialists and dental professionals, especially for the early childhood setting.

The program is based on evidence healthy teeth and gums are important for good health and in order to prevent tooth decay and gum disease, daily toothbrushing habits and healthy eating are key. Happy Teeth recognises both staff and parents/carers are essential parts of the program and they have a shared role in improving the health of the child within the early childhood setting.

As demonstrated in Happy Teeth, a toothbrushing program at a child care facility can be part of a comprehensive program that incorporates good nutrition, oral hygiene policies and practices into learning initiatives and curriculum.

By implementing a toothbrushing program in your facility, you will be helping children form healthy habits and refine their toothbrushing technique. Rest assured, the responsibility for toothbrushing will not fall solely on the child care facility. Your program will complement, not substitute, home oral hygiene routines.
Happy Teeth draws on the principles of role modeling, parent/carer involvement and social learning theories in order to harness young children’s natural mode of learning. The program empowers all those involved in the early childhood setting to make positive and informed changes with regard to oral hygiene behaviours.

Happy Teeth also appreciates all children, parents/carers and staff are unique and the diversity of each individual involved is respected. The program is yours to use as a stimulus for encouraging and practising positive oral hygiene behaviours in your facility. Happy Teeth reinforces the belief that children’s needs are best met when trusting relationships and partnerships are created between the early childhood facility, staff and families.

**Flexibility**

We understand child care facilities don’t always work in the same way. Happy Teeth acknowledges the individual nature of each child and each early childhood setting.

Happy Teeth has been developed as a flexible resource for you to customise in partnership with parents/carers and integrate into your facility’s every day activities. Happy Teeth gives you resources and activities to help you bring oral hygiene development into daily context for the children.

Happy Teeth resources and positive oral hygiene messages can be presented informally so children (and parents/carers) encounter them in the course of their day. For example, you could incorporate Happy Teeth ideas and resources into indoor and outdoor play, the ‘home corner’ or group time. Use the program to suit your facility, your staff, parents/carers and children. Together with parents/carers, you will be able to help children create their own stories and maximise participation and enthusiasm.

This kit is a guide for you to run with and create your own individual Happy Teeth facility!

**Accreditation**

Accreditation is a process most child care facilities will undertake at some time. Happy Teeth is an ideal tool for child care facilities undergoing accreditation. The program aligns with the National Childcare Accreditation Council’s (NCAC) Principle Standards relating to hygiene practices, food handling and the control of infectious diseases as outlined in the *Quality Improvement and Accreditation System Source Book*, the *Family Day Care Quality Assurance Quality Practices Guide* and the *Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance Quality Practices Guide*. 