Promoting healthy teeth in 4-5 year olds

Aims
To establish:
• the understanding teeth have many purposes: eating, speaking and smiling
• the understanding some foods are tooth-friendly, while others are not
• the understanding oral hygiene is important
• the understanding of unhealthy oral habits
• a positive and friendly image of dental staff.

Children in this age group bring with them prior knowledge and experience on which to base further understanding.

However, many children may not have a strong basis on which to build the concepts of:
• the functions of teeth
• importance of a healthy diet in relation to the development of healthy teeth
• correct oral hygiene
• the positive image of dental professionals.

So, the strategies outlined will need to be adapted to suit your setting and children’s individual needs. They are provided as guides or suggestions and are intended to be flexible and educators should feel comfortable modifying activities to suit various ages, group sizes and learning settings.

Objectives
Children will:
• use a toothbrush correctly, with adult supervision
• be familiar with words such as: healthy, unhealthy, tooth-friendly foods, plaque, gums, decay, circles, scrub, jiggle, bristles, fluoride, x-ray and probe
• role play dental staff to strengthen awareness and understanding of their role
• feel happy, relaxed and confident about a visit to a dental clinic
• understand that regular oral health will help them to have healthy teeth and happy smiles.

Strategies
Below are suggestions for various areas of learning relating to tooth function, correct oral hygiene, tooth-friendly foods and the role of dental staff. You will find it useful to use the Happy Teeth poster sets in the kit to illustrate these concepts.

Information provided is divided into developmental areas, with the understanding learning is an integrated process.

Working non-thematically
You can use this information to help stimulate children’s thinking and to give you ideas to reinforce the concept of oral health. It is important to take advantage of learning opportunities, for example, if toothbrushing has been introduced in the facility, or when children show an interest in either their own teeth or animal teeth.
Working thematically
This information can be used in the following areas:
- people in the community
- people who help us
- Dental Awareness Month (August)
- tooth-friendly versus ‘unfriendly’ foods
- and many more – the list is endless.

Physical
Gross motor
- Play a game with prepared pictures of tooth-friendly food and tooth-unfriendly food. Try stepping over the tooth-friendly food and jumping on the tooth-unfriendly food and/or throwing bean bags onto tooth-friendly food and over the tooth-unfriendly food.
- During outdoor play, children can make their bodies into an imaginary dental chair, taking it up and down, doing forms of sit-ups, pressing the levers and making the chair go up and down.
- Dress up in dental attire (see Educator resources section for the dental coat pattern).

Fine motor
- Operate any available puppets.
- Practise the finger/hand actions that help build the correct toothbrushing and handwashing skills.
- Clean teeth at least once a day within the facility.
- Roll out dough to make smiles. Use small white shells for teeth.
- Cut pictures from magazines that show healthy teeth to be put on a large poster of a smiling mouth.
- Draw their own germs or ‘strong-tooth’ characters.
- Paste white teeth-shaped pieces of paper onto the gums of the smiling mouths of various creatures that have teeth – including humans, crocodiles, rabbits, etc. (see the Songs, rhymes and activities section for more information).
- Cut tooth-friendly food pictures and/or unfriendly foods from magazines to put onto a large poster displaying a ‘big tick’ and/or a ‘big cross’.
- Cut up food that could be used on a tooth-friendly food platter.

Cognitive
Including language, sense of self, cultural awareness and understanding, thinking, communication. As well as the obvious cognitive/intellectual development resulting from the above activities through use of language, sorting, classifying, memorising of rhymes, developing an awareness of facial features of animals etc., the activities on the following page are aimed at specifically developing the cognitive abilities of the child.
• Provide puzzles that will stimulate a child’s thinking about dental health (see the list of suggested puzzles in the Additional resources section).

• Place positive multicultural and multi-ability images around the room that support central oral health concepts, eg. daily tooth brushing, tooth-friendly foods, functions of the mouth, role of dental staff (see the Additional resources section and the Happy Teeth poster set).

• Create simple mazes that will allow children to use pre-writing and pre-reading skills. Some ideas for mazes include:
  - filling a shopping trolley with tooth-friendly food to help the child have a healthy smile (see maze 1)
  - getting toothpaste to the toothbrush (see maze 2 and 3)
  - getting the dental professional ready (attire and equipment) to give the child their check-up (see maze 4).

• Create a domino game that allows a child to match up pictures that support core oral health concepts such as:
  - smiling mouth showing teeth
  - various dental instruments on separate cards
  - various pictures of healthy foods on separate cards
  - tooth-unfriendly foods with an ‘x’ through them on separate cards
  - dental professional at work.

• Use the Dental visit poster series to create a story about visiting the dental clinic.

• Work with children to create a ‘Big Book’ on various topics:
  - tooth-friendly foods
  - what the dental professional does
  - our visit to the dental clinic
  - when I grow up, I will be..................
    and I will..................
  - happy teeth, healthy teeth, what do you see?

• Select books from the Additional resources section or photos from the Happy Teeth Poster Sets, to promote daily toothbrushing, tooth-friendly foods, functions of the mouth and teeth, role of the dental staff, as well as other concepts appropriate to oral health, for example, going shopping for tooth-friendly foods.

• Use finger plays and rhymes at the beginning or end of the language session to support your planned story (see Songs, rhymes and activities section).
- Use the Happy Teeth poster set to reinforce children’s understanding of oral health concepts. Dramatic play could include:
  - counting teeth (using teothy puppets or other available dolls/toys)
  - matching the correct sized toothbrush with the mouth for which it is suited
  - pretending to fill out a record chart for the ‘patient’.
- Sing songs associated with oral hygiene concepts (see Songs, rhymes and activities section).
- Allow the children to use puppets to create their own stories about teeth. Children can also make their own puppets to symbolise teeth so they can play out their ideas at home.
- Provide boxes and pre-cut ‘teeth’, ‘eyes’, and ‘nose’ and suggest children might like to make some animals that have big white teeth - sharks, crocodiles, bears, dinosaurs etc.
- Cut out the teeth on a pre-drawn crocodile’s mouth.
- Create a shopping game by selling plastic fruit and giving children pretend money.
- Prepare a pictorial recipe showing foods that can be used as part of a healthy food platter or in a tooth-friendly (healthy) food recipe (see recipes in the Newsletter items section).
- Create a ‘visit to the dental clinic’ game using the Happy Teeth poster set - Dental Visit series.

Social/emotional
Including social living and learning, sense of self, cultural understanding and awareness.
- Allow children time to play in the dramatic play area with dental attire. This will reinforce emerging positive attitudes towards dental professionals and also encourage children to talk about any fears.
- Create a picture of ‘yourself’ - use a mirror to help children to see their facial features. Place particular emphasis on the teeth and the smile. Provide materials that will help the child to create this picture.
- Work with individual children who use a dummy or suck their fingers/thumb. Set goals for reducing this habit with the children and their parents/carers. Identify an appropriate reward for achieving this goal.
Case study: Tooth-friendly foods

The educator of a group of 25 four to five year olds sets up the dramatic play area as a ‘Healthy tooth food shop’. The area is established with an assortment of food, in particular fruit. The children choose and ‘buy’ food to make fruit kebabs for morning tea.

Discussion focuses around the kinds of food that can be used for kebabs – strawberries, bananas, rockmelon and watermelon, etc. The educator takes this opportunity to explore and reinforce the idea that taste is not a good way to tell if food is healthy or tooth-friendly.

This discussion forms the basis of the following language experience, that takes place at a later point in the day.

With the use of a felt board, the educator creates a person made from tooth-friendly foods (similar to the ‘Aiken Drum’ concept). Each part of the person (ie. trunk, limbs, head, facial features) is made from a different food item and added to the board, piece by piece, to form the person.

A discussion takes place concerning children’s food choices and food that tastes nice to some people may not taste nice to others. Children are asked to give indicators of tooth-friendliness. The general consensus, with direction from the educator, is that food that doesn’t stick to the teeth or isn’t very sweet, is most likely to be tooth-friendly. The educator requests feedback from the children regarding ideas about ‘tooth unfriendly’ foods - these are identified as predominantly sweets (see Fact Sheet 10 - Glossary of terms). The educator also identifies that while some foods are not high in sugar, they may be high in fat and are therefore not healthy choices.

The session ends with children making their own tooth-friendly food person at the collage table during free play session.

Discussion triggers

• Which fruits are your favourites?
• Which fruits smell the best?
• How do you like eating fruit?
• What vegetables are the best to eat?
• What makes vegetables and fruit good to eat?
• What sort of bread do you like to eat?
• Where do you buy healthy food?

Resources

• Fact sheet 7 – Healthy foods and fluids
• Fact sheet 8 – Sugars
• Fact sheet 10 – Glossary of terms.
Case study: Child and dentist

The educator begins the session with a finger play - *Here are the Dentist’s Glasses* (see Songs, rhymes and activities section).

The children are settled and the educator explains a set of photographs will be used to explain what happens when children visit the dental clinic (see Happy Teeth poster set - Dental visit series).

The children are asked if they have been to a dental clinic before (in this group of 24 children, two children had).

The educator continues the discussion, highlighting the dental attire, the need for a germ-free environment, and the role of the dental staff.

The session ends with children finding interesting things to note in the photographs.

**Discussion triggers**

- Who has been to visit a dental clinic?
- What did you see?
- What did the dentist wear?
- What did you have to do?
- Did you need to put some special things on?
- How did the room smell?
- What did the dentist do when you were in the chair?
- How did it feel?
- Who stayed with you when you went?

**Resources**

- Happy Teeth poster set – Dental visit series
- Fact sheet 10 – Glossary of terms
- CD of songs and rhymes