Promoting healthy teeth

Aims

- To establish an environment that supports oral health through facility policies and routines and parent/carer information.
- To facilitate spontaneous learning experiences involving individual babies or infants and their parents/carers.

It is important to note that ideas and resources for play can be adapted from the section focusing on 2-3 year olds.

As educators of the 0-2 year age group, your role will primarily be educating parents/carers about good oral health practices. By encouraging parents to breastfeed, use bottles appropriately and commence toothbrushing, you will ensure a strong basis for oral health in the early years.

Strategies

You can create a healthy environment by implementing the policies and routines outlined in this section. For example, staff can:

- ensure the facility has a nutrition policy (see examples pages 33, 34 and 35)
- ensure parents are aware of the facility’s food requirements (see sample letters pages 13 and 14)
- use the posters, pamphlets and newsletter items provided to inform parents about infant tooth decay, teething, tooth-friendly foods, how to clean baby’s teeth, when to start cleaning teeth and dummies (see Educator fact sheets)
- set up an infant tooth decay display to provide parents with information about avoiding infant tooth decay and appropriate use of bottles
- let parents/carers know just how much sugar sweet drinks contain by displaying the “Don’t rot your baby’s teeth” poster included in this kit
- remind parents to start brushing baby’s teeth once they start to come through
- remind parents if they live in an area with fluoridated water or where the natural fluoride level is high, they do not need to use toothpaste for baby until 18 months of age. In areas without fluoridated water, parents should use a small pea-size amount of low dose fluoride toothpaste to brush baby teeth from six months of age
- remind parents to get baby’s teeth checked by a dental professional before their second birthday
- implement practices in the facility that protect against infant tooth decay as detailed below:
  - Avoid fluids and foods that are sweet and sticky. Give water when thirsty and milk when hungry.
  - Discourage cordials or fruit drinks from being sent from home.
  - Discourage the use of bottles as pacifiers. Letting children suck on a bottle (of anything other than water) constantly throughout the day, or fall asleep with a bottle or sweetened dummy in their mouth, can cause severe tooth decay.
  - Put only water or milk in baby bottles. Each time a child drinks sugar-containing fluids (eg. fruit juice, cordial, soft drink), the acid produced attacks the child’s teeth for at least 20 minutes afterwards. Prolonged and frequent use means a continuous acid attack and the increased likelihood of decay.
  - Do not add flavouring to dummies.
  - Introduce the use of a cup from 6 months of age.
  - Discourage the use of the bottle after 12 months of age.

Be sure to contact your local nutritionist or oral health service for help with designing policies and routines to suit your facility.