Parents/carers are very important players in Happy Teeth. In particular their implementation of home oral care is an essential start for good oral health development. They can ensure that children are assisted to brush their teeth using the correct technique at the appropriate times. They are, after all, the children’s best role models.

Happy Teeth provides resources and suggested activities to engage parents from the beginning to develop ways of promoting healthy teeth in your facility. You can use the letter home, the newsletter items and the extensive take-home resources to complement your own ways of prompting and maintaining their involvement.

Parents/carers are more likely to become active supporters of Happy Teeth if they are given a role. There are many opportunities for this in the program – from developing ideas for ways of incorporating Happy Teeth policies into your facility, to taking part in the various Happy Teeth activities.

Parents/carers are the first teachers in a child’s life. These days, most parent/carers are extremely busy, with an increasing number of pressures placed upon them. Providing parents/carers with accessible information about healthy food choices and effective oral hygiene will help them to encourage their children to adopt healthy behaviours.

**Suggestions for parent/carer involvement**

- Informed parents/carers are more likely to be involved in Happy Teeth. You could have an information night and/or send home information about why oral hygiene is so important in preventing tooth decay and illness in your facility. Make sure your staff are also well-informed and are able to discuss with parents/carers what the children are doing as part of Happy Teeth.

- You may want to organise a nutritionist and/or dental professional to talk to staff about oral health eg. how to establish a toothbrushing program, adopting a nutrition policy.

- Face-to-face reminders and updates, parent/carer notice board announcements and individual child development record book updates can all be effectively used to communicate about Happy Teeth. When you and parents/carers are both clear about what methods of communication are used in your facility, sharing information becomes easier. Both parties should be aware of the informal and formal methods of communication they use to discuss each child’s development.

- The kit includes a letter home to parents, newsletter items for parents/carers and parent pamphlets about the importance of correct oral hygiene. You can use Happy Teeth resources, along with additional resources, to create a supportive learning environment (eg. place pictures and objects around the room, prepare and enjoy healthy foods).
Parents/Carers

- The kit also includes the Healthy Teeth for Life DVD. You can show this DVD at parent evenings and make it available to parents on loan to ensure all parents receive these important messages. You could even have parents view this DVD as part of their orientation to the facility.

- In the Additional resources section of this manual, you will find a list of useful resources to help you and the parents/carers in addressing health and wellbeing in your facility.

- Encourage parents/carers to take some time, however little, to explore some of the Happy Teeth resources at the facility with their child. By talking to their child about some Happy Teeth resources of interest, the children will know their parents/carers are interested in their special Happy Teeth facility. Ask parents/carers to show their appreciation and interest in anything their child has to tell or show them about Happy Teeth and toothbrushing.

- Share information with parents/carers about how their child is going with Happy Teeth. Discuss any individual achievements that you have noticed or things to keep an eye on. Encourage parents/carers to share any oral hygiene developments they have noticed in their child when at home. Listening to each other will help you to respond to the individual child’s needs.

- Encourage parents/carers to count their child’s teeth on a regular basis using a teaspoon or toothbrush to point and tap each tooth as they count it. This process simulates the dental check-up and can become a celebration of new teeth.

- Encourage parents/carers to use the toothbrushing calendar at home to help establish a toothbrushing routine.

- Let parents/carers know about upcoming activities at the facility and about the ways your facility is incorporating Happy Teeth into everyday activities. Encourage them to join in or to discuss these activities with the children. You are a team.

- Ask parents/carers to try to avoid using lollies as rewards. Explain how this habit takes away from good oral health messages.

- Ask parents/carers to give their input into how toothbrushing practice and oral hygiene skills can be included in your facility’s own statement, policy and standards. How can you work together to ensure the children are healthy while at the facility? What practices can you include in your facility’s policy statement to help with this? By making Happy Teeth a part of everyday policy and most importantly, part of everyday practice, you can follow best practice standards every day – not just specifically in anticipation of accreditation or licensing times.
Dear Parent/Carer

In order to prevent tooth decay, daily toothbrushing and healthy eating habits need to be established at an early age.

At [name of facility], we want to make sure that all our children are healthy and that all the teeth at our facility are ‘Happy Teeth’.

With this in mind, we are looking at strategies to improve oral health and nutrition within our facility.

By doing things like:

[Insert details of your facility’s practice, ie. facility toothbrushing program or oral health displays]

and promoting a nutritious and balanced diet for all our children through:

[Insert details of your facility’s practice, ie. facility supplying lunches or parent supplying]

we are trying to add to your child’s healthy growth and development.

We would love to hear any of your suggestions or questions about all the exciting and healthy changes happening in our facility.

Yours sincerely
Dear Parent/Carer

{name of facility} is introducing a new oral health program to promote strong healthy teeth among children at the facility. As you know, healthy teeth are an important part of a child’s self esteem. We want to make sure all of our children can smile with confidence.

As a part of our program, we will be introducing daily toothbrushing. This means children in our care will brush their teeth at least once during the day, probably after the lunch time meal.

We hope the combination of toothbrushing in our facility and at home with you will help your child establish positive toothbrushing routines.

From [date] each child will need:

[Insert a list of items that suit your facility’s toothbrushing program (eg. toothbrush, cup, toothpaste). If you unsure what you will need to list here, refer to page 39 of your Happy Teeth manual for ideas.]

We will clean and store the toothbrushes each day. All you need to do is read our newsletters for items about promoting strong, healthy teeth and watch out for our oral health displays.

Yours sincerely