

## Children with Disabilities Service



## Tips for Teeth Brushing

## Why is teeth brushing difficult for my child?

Tooth brushing can be difficult children and young people with a learning disability because they may:

- rely on caregivers to complete tooth brushing for them and may dislike people being this close to them
- have difficulties with coordination needed for tooth brushing
- struggle with understanding the sequence the of the steps involved
- have sensory differences e.g. they may dislike the feeling and taste of the tooth paste and brush in their mouth and on their teeth, they may dislike the feeling of someone too close to them, they may dislike the lights, sounds and smells in the bathroom
- not understand why tooth brushing is important

## Choosing a toothbrush and toothpaste

- There are many different types of tooth brush and paste to choose from dependant on your child's likes and dislikes
- Specialist brushes and pastes are available online and you may wish to seek advice from you dentist:

### **Things to consider when choosing a toothbrush:**

- Electric versus standard
- Texture: softer bristles, silicon bristles or a baby toothbrush may be more tolerable for some children.
- Angled or multi-surface brushes may cover more teeth surface area at once.



### **Things to consider when choosing a tooth paste:**

- Flavour: alternative flavours or flavourless pastes are available

- Texture: some children can struggle with the amount of foam a paste generates, some specialised pastes are 'non-foaming'

## How can I help my child with tooth brushing?

### Think...Preparation....Predictability and Positioning

#### BEFORE teeth brushing

- Be Prepared- have everything ready as this will help you stay calm and complete the brushing quickly
- Complete a calming or preferred activity to ensure your child is as settled as possible
- Use a countdown, a picture or an object to help your child understand it is time to brush their teeth
- Provide some firm massage to their cheeks and jawline (if required) to de-sensitise their muscles e.g. press along the jawline with a cloth or your hand



#### DURING teeth brushing

- Use a visual sequence (pictures) so your child can see the process and know what to expect (predictability)
- Use verbal, visual or timer countdown. This will tell you child when it will end
- If your child is dependent on you to brush their teeth think about your positioning. The following are some suggestions that you can chose from depending on your own child's preference:
  - Behind your child- coming from in front of your child can be daunting and positioning behind can also gives you a better angle to brush your child's teeth
  - Behind your child but slightly to one side
  - Child seated- this helps to provide a safe base and is useful if your child is taller than you

- In front of a mirror (as tolerated) so your child can see what is happening
- Try cupping your child's chin for stability (as tolerated), you may need to draw your child's cheek back with a finger or 2nd brush to gain access to their teeth
- Let your child watch you brushing so they can see the process
- Provide a distraction if appropriate during brushing e.g. a 'stimming' toy, a comforter, a teddy etc.

### AFTER teeth brushing

- Encourage your child to spit out paste residue rather than rinsing
- Mouthwash is not recommended as this can rinse fluoride away post brushing and is not advised for children with swallowing difficulties
- Complete a calming activity e.g. hand massage or shoulder rub (if tolerated)
- Give praise- 'well done', high five or hug.
- Give a reward of a preferred toy or game
- If your child understands reward charts you can put a sticker on their chart



**Remember: It is very important to have regular dental check-ups and to discuss difficulties regarding teeth brushing with your child's dentist.**