

Sensory Strategies for Tooth Brushing

- Begin with oral motor activities to desensitise the mouth before brushing teeth such as blowing bubbles, drinking from a sports bottle or drinking through a straw.
- Consider the position the child is in. Sitting may be preferable to standing.
- Brush in front of a mirror and provide a flannel so the child can wipe away any drips.
- Where possible encourage the child to brush their own teeth or if needed place your hand over theirs to help.
- It may be helpful for the child to put toothbrush in their own mouth and to start brushing which will help to desensitise their mouth, the carer can then finish brushing.
- Use a firm touch pressure not a light touch and softer bristles may be easier to tolerate.
- Use a timer or sing a song to give a clear end to the activity.
- Develop a predictable routine for example start with the top teeth on the left then the right then the bottom etc.
- Massage the gums and teeth with a soft cloth, a rubber finger brush or a vibrating toothbrush to help desensitise.
- The vibration of an electric toothbrush may be calming.
- Avoid brushing the gums to begin with and do not present the toothbrush too far back and this may cause gagging.
- Use a mild flavoured or nonflavoured toothpaste such as Oranurse or even nothing initially and introduce it gradually.
- Allow time whilst brushing so that the child can close their mouth, swallow or rinse and wet the toothbrush frequently.
- If the child resists tooth brushing let them chew on a damp wash cloth after meals, eating a small piece of cheese after meals also helps to restore to PH balance of the mouth and frequent drinks of water are helpful to remove foods.

Dentist

- Use a social story or photograph of the waiting room and dentist chair with a child having their teeth examined.
- Visit the dentist on a separate occasion before work is required to have the opportunity to sit in the dentist chair, have the dentist move it up down and back.
- Allow the child to have a pair of the dentist gloves to practice with.
- Use a mirror to let the person look inside their mouth and eat something chewy prior to the appointment.
- Complete some oral deep pressure prior to the appointment for example an electric toothbrush and a mini massager.
- Allow fidget toys during the session and use a distractor such as a tablet/iPad.
- Have the child wear a heavy or tight hat before and during the appointment and verbally warn them about each thing before it is done.
- The child could wear a weighted vest or lap pad during the appointment to provide extra calming pressure.
- Ear defenders or headphones may help to reduce background noises such as the drill from another room.
- Allow sunglasses if the child is sensitive to bright light.
- Consider the use of a hand signal if the child needs a break.
- You may want to consider a specialist dentist.