

Helping Children Brush Their Teeth in Child Care Programs



When & Where to Brush:

- Children should ideally brush their teeth after meals at the sink.
- For a simple group routine, preschool children can brush together at the table.

Why It Matters:

- Creates lifelong oral health habits.
- Helps prevent cavities, gum disease, and infections.
- Ensures all children receive consistent oral hygiene support.



Toothbrushes

- Each child must have a soft-bristled, age-appropriate toothbrush labeled with their name.
- Toothbrushes must not be shared or borrowed.
- Store toothbrushes out of children's reach, preferably outside the bathroom.
- Store toothbrushes upright so bristles do not touch surfaces or other brushes.
- Rinse each toothbrush after use and store upright to air dry.
- Replace toothbrushes after a child is ill, when bristles are worn or frayed, or every 3 to 4 months.
- Do not sanitize or disinfect toothbrushes with chemicals.
- Discard any contaminated toothbrushes.



Toothpaste

- Each child should have their own labeled toothpaste tube. If tubes must be shared, put toothpaste on a clean paper towel or cup, not directly on the toothbrush.
- For children under 3 years: use a small smear, about the size of a grain of rice.
- For children 3 years and older: use a pea-sized amount.
- Store toothpaste out of children's reach.



Hygiene & Safety

- Children should wash their hands before and after brushing.
- Staff should wash hands before and after helping and wear a new pair of disposable gloves for each child.
- Follow standard infection-prevention precautions.
- Clean and sanitize the brushing area, sink, and table (if used) before and after brushing.
- Make sure children can safely reach the sink using a sturdy, wide-based step stool.
- Keep the area dry.
- Children should not walk, run, or play with toothbrushes.



Tips for Success:

- Staff should supervise and teach proper brushing techniques.
- Brush infants' teeth and assist toddlers, even after they have attempted to brush.
- Praise children for brushing well to reinforce positive habits.
- Total brushing time should be around 2 minutes.
- Encourage families to establish a dental home for their child.
- Include oral health topics in your program's curriculum.
- Have a plan to manage oral health emergencies.