

## Make Brushing Fun for Little Ones

### *Tips for Promoting Good Oral Hygiene Habits in Kids*

Sometimes the only thing more difficult than getting kids to clean their teeth properly is getting them to clean them at all. But parents have to meet the challenge, because by getting used to oral hygiene early kids can establish lifelong healthy habits and get comfortable with dental practices, which could make their first dental checkups more productive and maybe even enjoyable.

The dentists who serve as national oral health advisors for Delta Dental Plans offer the following tips for getting reluctant kids to open up and say “oral health:”

**Trade places:** Tired of prying your way in every time it’s time to brush the tot’s teeth? Why not reverse roles and let the child brush yours? Then you can laugh a lot and show how much fun it is to be pampered.

**Show how shiny:** Make sure the kids see you brushing your own teeth, and then make a point of showing off your shiny clean teeth. Ham it up; make it seem like a treat and privilege to have a shiny smile. Also, encourage your kids to show off their own smiles once their teeth are clean.

**Take turns:** Set an egg timer or other alarm and have the kids brush their teeth on their own for 30 seconds. Then you brush their teeth for 30 seconds. Repeat this at least



twice, or go as long as the kids will tolerate. When brushing at bedtime, it’s important that you have the last go at it. Saliva production slows down during the sleep cycle and can’t wash away as much plaque, so it’s important to make teeth as plaque-free as possible before going to sleep.

**Call in reinforcements:** If older children stubbornly neglect to brush or floss and repeated reminders fall on seemingly uninterested ears, maybe it’s time to change the messenger. Call the dental office before the children’s next checkup, and let the dentist know what’s going on. The same motivational message might be heeded if it comes from a third party.

When brushing, it is best to hold the toothbrush against the gumline at an angle—and with a light grasp. Plaque is soft and is better removed by thorough but light brushing than by vigorous scrubbing, which can cause unwanted wear on teeth. Children’s teeth and gums can be sensitive too, so a gentle touch will make them more comfortable.

**Northeast Delta Dental**

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