



National Children's Dental Health Month

Many childhood practices affect dental health. Well-informed providers can help children to have healthy smiles.



Bottle mouth, the name for decayed front teeth, occurs mostly in children nine months to three years old who use bottles for comforting. When the child takes a bottle to bed or wanders around with the bottle in his mouth, the liquid stays on the teeth for a long while. Bacteria break down the carbohydrates in milk or juice. This process causes acids to form. The acids break down teeth and cause cavities. If children need a bottle for comforting, it should contain only water. Substitute other comforters such as a stuffed toy, soft cloth, or pacifier.



Sticky snacks that stick on teeth also cause cavities. Chewing gum and chewy candies are never recommended. Children should brush their teeth or rinse their mouths after eating some otherwise healthy snacks like raisins and dried fruit. Apples, on the other hand, act like a toothbrush, cleaning food from teeth.



Fear of dentists is not unusual in young children. Providers can help children see that dentists are helpers. Talk with them about going to the dentist in a calm, factual, and unafraid manner. Children can play "dentists office," pretending to be dentists, hygienists, and patients. Some county dental associations have promotional materials. Check with your dentist to see what is available in your area.



Encourage children to brush their teeth. Two-year-olds, who want to do everything by themselves, should brush their own teeth. But you should supervise closely and teach them the correct way to do it. Have them brush after every meal. If that is impossible, have children rinse their mouths carefully. Help toddlers brush, and after babies have eaten, wipe their teeth with a soft cloth.



Thumb-sucking can have unfortunate consequences. If a child sucks his thumb after the age of three or four, discuss it with the parents and encourage the child to stop. Long-term thumb-sucking causes flaring of the upper teeth and changes the anatomy of the upper jaw. Get the book "David Decides About Thumb-sucking" by Susan Heitler. It offers helpful information about the situation for parents and children.

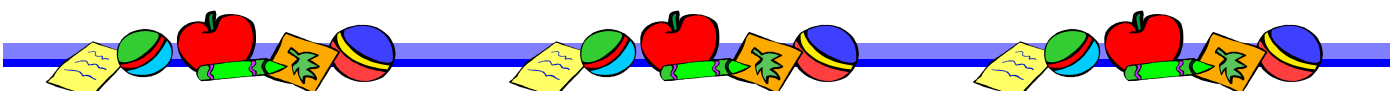


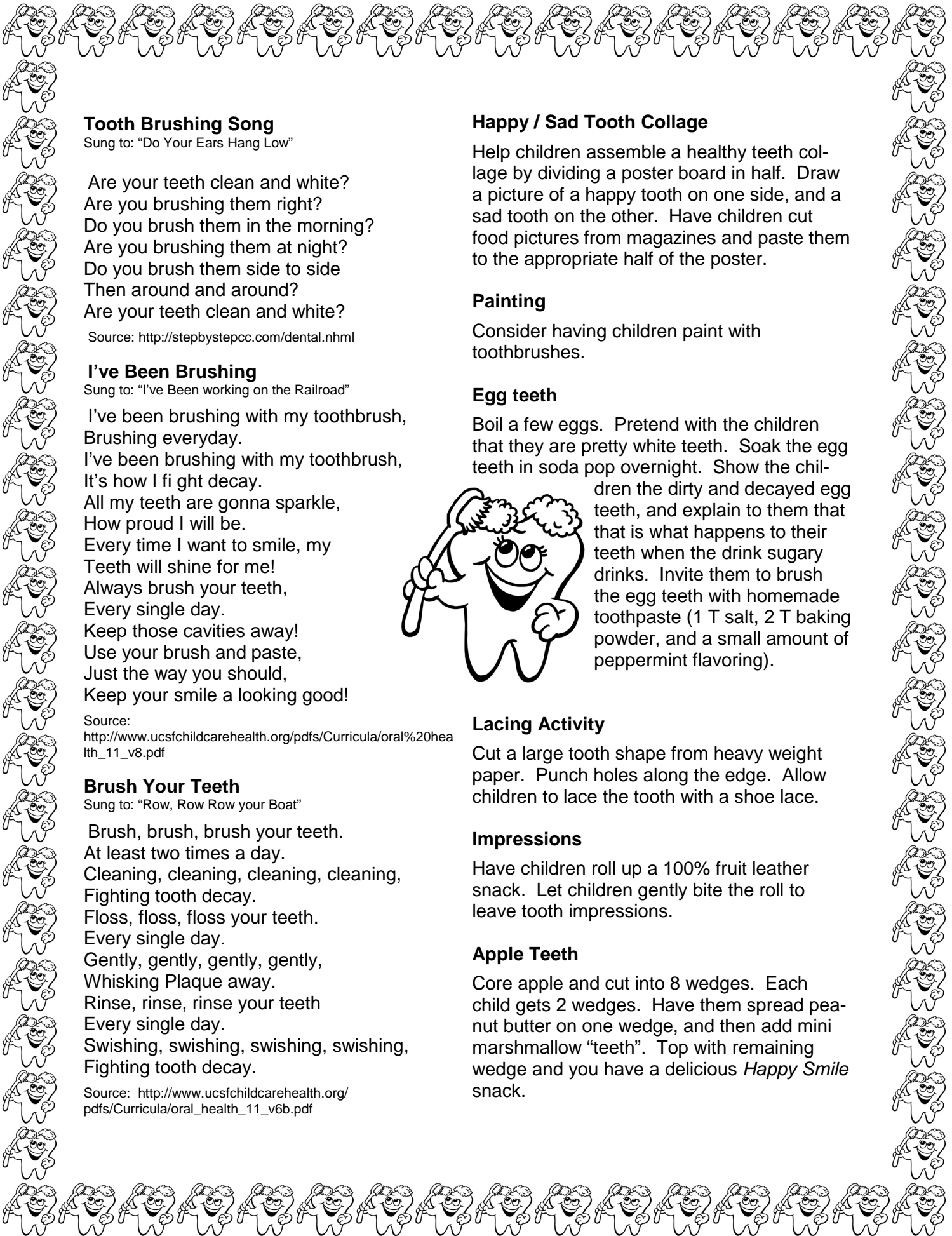
If an accident knocks a tooth loose, parents should talk to the child's dentist. Usually, the teeth will survive, but the dentist should check. If a tooth gets knocked out, save the tooth in a cup of milk and take the child to a dentist immediately.

Reprinted with permission from the National Network for Child Care - NNCC. Morse, N.F. (1992). Children's dental health. In Todd, C.M. (Ed.), *Day care center connections*, 1(5), pp. 6-7. Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service.

Are you looking for additional resources and information about dental health? You may find the following publication of interest:

<http://chfs.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/4AF5A991-D6B6-486F-98D6-FDF707E38319/0/smilecurriculum.pdf>





Tooth Brushing Song

Sung to: "Do Your Ears Hang Low"

Are your teeth clean and white?
Are you brushing them right?
Do you brush them in the morning?
Are you brushing them at night?
Do you brush them side to side
Then around and around?
Are your teeth clean and white?

Source: <http://stepbystepcc.com/dental.nhml>

I've Been Brushing

Sung to: "I've Been working on the Railroad"

I've been brushing with my toothbrush,
Brushing everyday.
I've been brushing with my toothbrush,
It's how I fight decay.
All my teeth are gonna sparkle,
How proud I will be.
Every time I want to smile, my
Teeth will shine for me!
Always brush your teeth,
Every single day.
Keep those cavities away!
Use your brush and paste,
Just the way you should,
Keep your smile a looking good!

Source:
http://www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org/pdfs/Curricula/oral%20health_11_v8.pdf

Brush Your Teeth

Sung to: "Row, Row Row your Boat"

Brush, brush, brush your teeth.
At least two times a day.
Cleaning, cleaning, cleaning, cleaning,
Fighting tooth decay.
Floss, floss, floss your teeth.
Every single day.
Gently, gently, gently, gently,
Whisking Plaque away.
Rinse, rinse, rinse your teeth
Every single day.
Swishing, swishing, swishing, swishing,
Fighting tooth decay.

Source: http://www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org/pdfs/Curricula/oral_health_11_v6b.pdf

Happy / Sad Tooth Collage

Help children assemble a healthy teeth collage by dividing a poster board in half. Draw a picture of a happy tooth on one side, and a sad tooth on the other. Have children cut food pictures from magazines and paste them to the appropriate half of the poster.

Painting

Consider having children paint with toothbrushes.

Egg teeth

Boil a few eggs. Pretend with the children that they are pretty white teeth. Soak the egg teeth in soda pop overnight. Show the children the dirty and decayed egg teeth, and explain to them that that is what happens to their teeth when the drink sugary drinks. Invite them to brush the egg teeth with homemade toothpaste (1 T salt, 2 T baking powder, and a small amount of peppermint flavoring).



Lacing Activity

Cut a large tooth shape from heavy weight paper. Punch holes along the edge. Allow children to lace the tooth with a shoe lace.

Impressions

Have children roll up a 100% fruit leather snack. Let children gently bite the roll to leave tooth impressions.

Apple Teeth

Core apple and cut into 8 wedges. Each child gets 2 wedges. Have them spread peanut butter on one wedge, and then add mini marshmallow "teeth". Top with remaining wedge and you have a delicious *Happy Smile* snack.