

[View the web version](#)[Go to ECLKC](#)

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services & Administration for Children & Families

Like Us Follow Us



NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Health and Wellness



August 2017

- **Talking with Children About Dental Visits**
 - **Tips for Head Start Staff to Share with Parents to Prepare Children for Dental Visits**
- **Cook's Corner: Strawberry Watermelon Popsicles**

Did You Know?

- Children should have their first dental visit by age 1.
- During a child's dental visit, the dental team will:
 - Check the child's teeth and look for tooth decay or other problems.
 - Clean the child's teeth and provide tips for daily care.
 - Assess the need for fluoride.



Talking with Children About Dental Visits

It's understandable that children sometimes get nervous about their first few dental visits. Going to the dental office or clinic is a new and unfamiliar experience for them. For young children who are not used to oral health care yet, having their teeth and mouths examined can feel intrusive. What young children hear about dental visits affects what they think an upcoming visit will be like. If they are told that bad things may happen during a dental visit, they might feel afraid.

Tips for Head Start Staff to Share with Parents to Prepare Children for Dental Visits

- **Be positive.** Dental visits are easy and painless for most children. Suggest that parents use positive statements about what will happen during a visit. For example, say:
 - "The dentist will see what a good job you do taking care of your teeth."
 - "When you leave the dental office, your teeth will be nice and clean."
- **Keep it short and simple.** If children ask what will happen during the dental visit, advise parents to give a short, simple answer. For example, parents can say, "the dental hygienist will count how many teeth you have." Sharing too much information about dental visits may confuse and worry children.
- **Don't bring up shots or possible pain.** Many children worry about getting shots or having their teeth drilled during a dental visit. Oral health providers use "sleepy juice" to numb the gum before giving a shot, so the child barely feels it. If the child asks whether he or she will get a shot, a good answer for parents to give is "I don't know, but we can ask the dentist or dental hygienist."
- **Tell parents to keep their fears to themselves.** If parents have fears about dental visits, tell them not to share their feelings with their child. Hearing about adults' fears can make children afraid of dental visits too.
- **Role-play visiting the dentist and dental hygienist.** Tell parents to have children dress up and pretend that they are dentists or dental hygienists. Children can use white shirts as lab coats, paper napkins as patient bibs, and coffee filters and yarn as masks. Advise parents to let children pretend to examine and count their parents', sisters', or brothers' teeth.



- **Read books or watch videos together.** Encourage parents to use age-appropriate books and videos about dental visits. Remind parents to preview them before reading or watching them with their child. Books and videos with words like hurt, pain, shot, drill, or any other words that may frighten children should not be used. Tell parents to ask a children's librarian, dentist, dental hygienist, or early childhood education expert to suggest one or two good books and videos about dental visits.

The Sesame Workshops [Healthy Teeth, Healthy Me](#) has many materials in English and Spanish that can help prepare children for dental visits in a positive way. The PBS Parents webpage [Talking with Kids About Health](#) has useful tips in English and Spanish on what to say to children before and during a dental visit.

- **Make dental visits fun.** Encourage parents to have children bring a favorite stuffed animal or blanket to the dental visit. Let children wear a special outfit or costume to the visit. Also, suggest that parents plan a fun activity after the visit.

Cook's Corner: Strawberry Watermelon Popsicles

Here's a delicious healthy snack that staff and children can make in a Head Start classroom or at home with their families.

Ingredients

- 3 cups of cubed watermelon
- 1 cup of strawberries with green leafy top removed (fresh or frozen)
- Zest and juice of 1 lime



Directions

1. Put all ingredients in a blender and blend until completely smooth.
2. Pour into popsicle molds or paper cups.
3. If using paper cups, place a popsicle stick in each paper cup.
4. Freeze 3–4 hours, or until very solid.

Makes 10 servings

Safety Tip: An adult should slice the ingredients and supervise use of the blender.

Contact Us

The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback on this issue, as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to health@ecetta.info or call 866-763-6481.

Subscribe or view all issues of [Brush Up on Oral Health](#) on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center.

This issue was developed with funds from grant #90HC0013 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, Office of Child Care, and Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau by the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness. This resource may be duplicated for noncommercial uses without permission. This publication is in the public domain, and no copyright can be claimed by persons or organizations.

School readiness begins with health!

Office of Head Start (OHS) | 330 C Street, SW | 4th Floor Mary E. Switzer Building | Washington, DC 20201

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov> | 1-866-763-6481 | [Contact Us](#)