

# Toddler Teeth Cleaning

## - a speech pathologist's guide -

created by Eden Crossley (speech pathologist)

### Toddler Teeth Cleaning: An Overview

As a speech pathologist, I work directly with the oral motor system. The jaw, lips, tongue and you guessed it - teeth. Once we lose our baby teeth, we have one set for life. Further, our teeth impact feeding and swallowing. Something I often see arise on my caseload is parents telling me that they can't seem to get their child to brush their teeth. I always had my tips and tricks in my back pocket, but since becoming a mum myself, I realised how truly hard it is to get a small child to clean their teeth. So, I developed a system, or a checklist rather that I use with my kids to get their teeth clean with as little fuss possible.

### Getting started with tooth brushing

You should start cleaning your children's teeth as soon as they get them. Yeah, around that 6-8 month mark. Sounds crazy, right? But if you start now, they will get familiar with the routine and sensations that come with toothbrushing.

My favourite starter toothbrush is the Pigeon Baby Training Toothbrush Set. I also like the Baby Silicone Finger Toothbrush, that you can slip on your finger to clean their little teeth and gums, and the Baby Teeth and Gum Wipes, which are great for giving the teeth a wipe following milk feeds. (Disclaimer, I have worked with this brand in the past, but I have enjoyed their products since before our working relationship). However, any brand of toothbrush is acceptable.

In terms of toothpaste, I always suggest a dentist recommended toothpaste. Finally, as the parent, you should always be brushing your child's teeth, however they of course are allowed to have a go. What I mean by this is - you shouldn't rely on your child to do their whole teeth cleaning routine on their own.

### The 4 N's

I created the 4 N's of toothbrushing as a system for myself to get my toddler willing to brush her teeth.

| Normalise                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Narrate                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
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| <p>Brush your teeth together. Let them see you brushing, following each step. Toothpaste on the brush, front teeth, side teeth &amp; back teeth. Spitting &amp; rinsing. Let them see you doing it so they know this is a part of their normal routine.</p> <p>Adding to this, have a routine established for when teeth cleaning occurs. In our house, we brush our teeth once we are dressed, but before we put our shoes on. That's how it has always been and it is expected each morning. As for night time, we brush after we have put pyjamas on, before our bedtime story.</p> | <p>Talk through (or sing) what you are doing. It may look like this:</p> <p>“Toothpaste on... brush front teeth... brush bottom teeth... let's do the back...”</p> <p>If your child is seeming like they want to stop, that's okay, but let them know we brush our teeth for two minutes. It may take time to build this up. If they want to stop before the two minutes is up, keep standing in the bathroom, and let them hold the toothbrush themselves.</p>                          |
| Novelty                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Negotiate                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <p>Bring a bit of fun to it! Read books about cleaning teeth, watch Youtube Videos (Elmo and Ms Rachel have a great teeth-cleaning music video) and listen to songs. As part of our routine, we listen to the Wiggles Song ‘Brush Your Teeth’. My daughter knows when that song is on, we get our teeth cleaned, and we don't stop until the song is over. I like this song as it has a pause for spitting out the toothpaste halfway.</p>                                                                                                                                             | <p>This one is important for building trust and positivity around teeth cleaning. Give your child ownership around aspects of cleaning their teeth.</p> <p>For example:</p> <p>“do you want to sit on the stool, or stand near the sink?”</p> <p>“Do you want the Wiggles or Ms Moni song?”</p> <p>Giving small but meaningful choices to your child can help them feel ownership when it comes to cleaning their teeth, making them feel more motivated and interested in the task.</p> |

## Final Comments

Seeing a dentist should be part of your yearly checkups. When your child is booked into the GP to get their check, book into the dentist as well. Oftentimes, you can book them alongside yourself. Dental checkups for young children are non-invasive and often involve the dentist taking a look at their teeth & seeing they are healthy. If you have any concerns about your child's teeth, it is very important you take them to the dentist to get this looked at.

If you are concerned about visiting the dentist, I recommend reading books about the dentist - I have one linked on my Amazon Storefront.

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