



Oral Health Promotion in Preschool Children

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Oral health is fundamental to general health and well-being. A healthy mouth enables an individual to speak, eat and socialize without experiencing active disease, discomfort or embarrassment. Children who suffers from poor health are 12 times more likely to have restricted activity days than those who do not. [1] Oral diseases are the commonest chronic diseases and are amongst the most expensive diseases to treat [2,3]. Although oral health can be regarded as a fundamental human right, inequalities in oral health continue to exist globally [2]. The effect of untreated caries on the growth and wellbeing of children often remains ignored [4]. Oral diseases affect the quality of life of children and account for pain, impaired aesthetics, recurrent infections, eating troubles, sleeping difficulties, emergency visits to dentists and hospitals, poor ability to learn, insufficient nutrition, and improper growth and development [3]. Dental caries affects children socially as well as psychologically. Furthermore, treating dental caries in children is expensive due not only to the direct costs of treatment but also the indirect costs such as the time taken off by the parents to take the child to a dentist [4].

Promoting oral health care in preschool children Considering that preschoolers are developing affective, social, and motor and language skills that allow greater autonomy for their personal care, and for active participation in their routine at home and in educational institutions, it is relevant that healthy behaviors are promoted and consolidated in this age group [5].

Oral health in preschool children is to a large extent determined by behavioral factors, in particular, inadequate oral hygiene habits, frequent consumption of sugared snacks and drinks and lack of preventive visits to the dentist. These habits are established early in life, and their development is mediated by parental behaviors, mostly of the mother. In addition, dental caries is more prevalent among children who are raised in deprived communities or whose parents have a lower educational level or immigrant background [6].

Motivation and health education are important tools for promoting the oral health of preschool children. It is understood that appropriate educational programs on oral hygiene have a potential motivating value, as they constitute a means of introducing children's health care in a pleasant way. Audiovisuals, games, puppets, theater and dynamics are recommended as excellent means of promoting learning, providing children with a variety of experiences and stimuli in a fun and enjoyable way, and motivating them for self-care [7,8]. The use of individual instruction for the practice of

oral hygiene with preschoolers is also suggested, and is considered useful because it is an easy and low-cost method [9]. For better learning in children, it is important that educational programs are not performed once, but repetitively, evidencing the effectiveness of the reinforcement on the education of oral hygiene practices [8].

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