

# Teaching Family and Friends in Your Community

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Old people can remember when there were fewer problems with teeth and gums. Children's teeth were stronger and adults kept their teeth longer.

Times are changing. Today there are more tooth and gum problems than ever before. In many countries, tooth decay and gum disease are two of the fastest growing health problems.

This unhealthy situation is getting worse, for two reasons: changes in the kind of food people now are eating, and not enough cleaning after they eat.

**BEFORE**, the food people ate was their own, grown and prepared by themselves.



Even sugar cane was not as bad as the sticky candy children eat today. The sugar was bad for the teeth, but the fiber in the cane helped rub them clean.

**NOW**, more people are buying softer and sweeter food from the store. This kind of food sticks to the teeth more easily so it has more time to attack the teeth and gums.



Everyone must be more careful to clean away soft, sweet food. But many people do not know how. Some, especially children, do not even try.

Many people do not understand that tooth and gum problems are caused by certain kinds of food, and poor cleaning of the teeth. In fact, some have a completely different belief.



Do not attack a belief because it is traditional. Many traditions are more healthy than 'modern' things. Often, instead of telling people that their belief is wrong, you can remind them of a different tradition that is healthy.

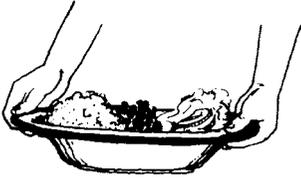
**Help your family and friends to recognize their healthy traditions. Then help them find new ways to use these same traditions for better health.**



## BE A GOOD EXAMPLE

Other people like to watch what you do before they try something different. First show members of your family and then they will be an example to others in your community. For example:

1. Instead of buying all your foods from the store, buy fresh fruits and vegetables from the market. It is even better to grow food in your own garden.



Learn to use several different kinds of foods in each meal. Mixing foods is a healthy idea. Invite friends to share your meals and see the number of different foods you have at each meal.

2. Do not buy fizzy drinks like Coca-Cola or Fanta. They have a lot of added sugar which quickly makes children's teeth rotten.

Also, do not sweeten your child's milk or tea.

When she is young she can learn to enjoy drinks that are not sweet.

Clean, cool water, tea with little sugar, milk, or water from a young coconut are best to drink. Fresh fruits are delicious when you are thirsty.



**Most important: do not give your child a feeding bottle, especially one with a sweet drink inside.** (See page 3.)



3. Keep your children's teeth clean. Your friends will notice clean teeth or teeth that are dirty or have cavities. **Remember, clean teeth are healthy teeth.**

An older child can clean his own teeth if you show him how.

A younger child cannot. He needs help. Each day someone older should clean his teeth for him (page 18).

**When you teach, remember that as others learn, they too become teachers. Each person can teach another.**

Encourage people to pass along what you have taught. Mothers can teach family and friends. Students can talk at home with brothers, sisters, and older family members.

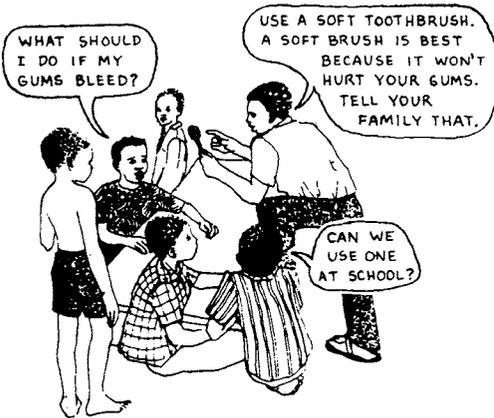
FROM THE HEALTH CLINIC...

... TO THE HOME



FROM THE SCHOOL...

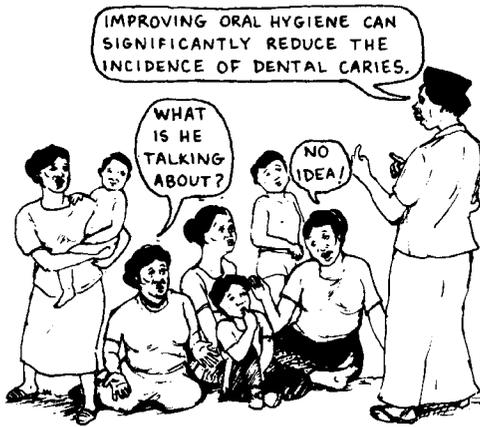
... TO THE HOME



If all learners become teachers, a simple message can begin in the health clinic or school and reach many more people at home.

## FINDING THE BEST WAY TO TEACH

Deciding **what** to teach is important, but just as important is **how** to teach.



Learning cannot take place when you use words that people do not understand. They will learn something only when they see how it is related to their lives.

Remember this when you teach about eating good food and keeping teeth clean. Design your own health messages, but be ready to change them if people are not understanding or accepting what you say.

Here are five suggestions for teaching well.

### 1. Learn First From the People

Get involved in your community's activities. Learn about people's problems, and then offer to help solve them. People will listen to you when they know that you care about them and want to help.

Sit and talk with people. Learn about their customs, traditions and beliefs. **Respect them.**

Learn about their health habits. Improving health may require changing some habits and strengthening others.

Learn also about tooth decay and gum disease in your community.



Make people smile—then look into their mouths.

Find out how many children and adults are having problems with their teeth and gums. Do a survey such as the one on page 220.

## 2. Build New Ideas Onto Old Ones

People find their own ways to stay healthy. Many traditions are good, helpful, and worth keeping. But some are not.

When you teach, start with what people already understand and are doing themselves. Then add new ideas.

This method of teaching is called 'association of ideas'. It helps people to understand new ideas because they can compare them with what they already are doing.

In this way people can more easily accept, remember, and do what you suggest.

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### A HEALTHY TRADITION — builds —> NEW IDEAS AND WAYS

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Sweeping the compound makes it a clean and healthy place to live.

in the same way



Brushing the teeth and gums keeps them clean and healthy.



A small child cannot find his own lice. Mother knows she must help him.

in the same way

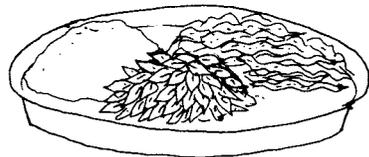


A small child cannot see the food on his teeth. He needs help with that also.



Different vegetables when planted together—like maize and yams—help each other to grow.

in the same way



Eating different kinds of food helps people to grow. Eating them several times a day makes your teeth and gums, as well as your whole body, grow stronger.

## STORY TELLING—AN EXAMPLE

People everywhere have a tradition of teaching with stories. Many of the things we believe, we learned through stories we heard from parents, friends, and teachers. This is good, except when a story teaches something that isn't true! When a woman gets pregnant, for example, she hears many stories, and she wants to learn whatever she can from these stories. Unfortunately, **some traditional beliefs about pregnancy are partly wrong**. An example is the belief that one must always have dental problems during pregnancy.

Here is a story you can tell to help people see that they are partly right about pregnancy and dental problems, but that there is more to understand.

### A Story: Bertine's teeth

Bertine was the dental worker in her village. She was a young woman, but the villagers respected her because she was such a careful worker, and because she knew how to fill cavities and pull teeth without hurting people. She also spent a lot of time teaching people how to avoid dental problems. "Clean your teeth every day!" she often said, at her clinic, at the schools, at village meetings. "Eat a mixture of foods, especially a lot of fruits and vegetables! Avoid candy and sweet, sticky foods!"

When Bertine was 23 years old, she got married and became pregnant. She also began to have some tooth problems of her own. She saw that her gums were bleeding when she cleaned her teeth, and she had small cavities in two of her teeth. As the dental worker, she was embarrassed to have tooth problems, but an older woman told her, "It's natural to lose teeth when you have babies, Bertine. As we say, 'For each child, a tooth'."



One day Lucie, a dental worker from a nearby village, came to see her friend Bertine. Lucie had a young baby, and Bertine asked her a lot of questions about babies and about pregnancy. Then Bertine said, "Of course, I'm having lots of problems with my teeth." "Why do you say 'of course'?" asked Lucie. "Well," Bertine replied, "For each child, a tooth."

"But that's not true!" Lucie cried. "You think you are having tooth and gum problems because you are pregnant, but I bet you are having these problems for all the usual reasons."

“The usual reasons?” asked Bertine.

“Yes,” said Lucie. “How often do you eat now that you are pregnant?” “Well, a lot more than I used to—I have two persons to feed!” “And do you still eat sweet foods sometimes?” Lucie asked. “I guess I do,” said Bertine, “and more sweets than before, because I eat more often.”

“How about teeth cleaning?” asked Lucie. “Do you clean as often as you did before you were pregnant?” “No,” Bertine admitted, “I heard I was going to have tooth problems anyway, and I have been so tired lately.... Oh! Do you suppose that these are the only reasons I am having these problems? How do you know so much about this, Lucie?”

“Because I had the same problems, Bertine. I learned the truth the hard way. I had an infected tooth, and the infection passed to my kidneys. At the health clinic, they told me it is not necessary to have tooth problems during pregnancy—and it is even dangerous. I am lucky I did not lose my baby! That can happen, you know, when a tooth problem is not treated. We must fill your cavities right now.”

“You mean I can be treated now, before I have my baby?”

“Yes, and you should!” said Lucie. “And you can take better care of your teeth. It is true that because of the pregnancy, your gums are weaker, and they can get infected. But this means you should take even more care than usual to: **(1)** clean regularly and **(2)** eat the right foods. You need to have strength when you are pregnant. An infection in your mouth does not help that. Because your gums are weak, it is also good to **(3)** rinse your mouth every day with warm salt water (see page 7), and if you cannot get fresh fruits and vegetables, then **(4)** take a tablet of Vitamin C every day.”



Lucie then offered to clean Bertine’s teeth and to fill her cavities. When she touched Bertine’s gums, they bled, and Lucie said, “They will bleed at first, but after you clean them regularly for a while, they will be stronger. Bleeding gums are dangerous to a pregnant woman. The bleeding can increase anemia, which is a serious problem.”

“If a pregnant woman’s tooth has an abscess, is it safe to pull it before she has the baby?” asked Bertine. “Yes,” said Lucie, “you just must be gentle. A woman gets tired sitting in a dental chair for a long time, and sometimes you must give some extra anesthetic so she does not feel any pain.”

### 3. Keep Your Messages Short and Simple

Instead of partially teaching too many things, it is better to discuss a few things well. After learning what health problems the people feel are greatest, decide **what** information will help them solve these problems. Then think of **how** to share the information. Try to:

- **Use simple words** (see page 13). If you must use a big word, take the time to explain it.
- **Teach people when they are ready to learn.** A sick person, for example, usually wants to know how to prevent his sickness from returning. He will remember what you tell him.
- **Repeat the most important message many times.** Whenever you teach about staying healthy, remember to emphasize eating good food and keeping teeth clean. Repetition helps people remember.
- **Let people see what you mean.** See pages 26 to 34 for ways to use pictures, puppets, and plays.

### 4. Teach Wherever People Get Together

Knowing **where** to teach is sometimes as important as **how** you teach. Instead of asking people to come to a class you have organized, go to them. Look for ways to fit into their way of living. You both will gain from the experience. They will ask more questions, and you will learn how to work with people to solve problems.

Talk with people where they gather near their homes.

Talk to women at health clinics and in the market. Talk to men at business and farming meetings.



Talk to men and women at church meetings, in parents' groups at their children's school, and at community meetings.

Teach men and women at reading groups.

## 5. Teach Something People Can Do Right Away

It is good to tell a mother to keep her child's teeth clean, but it is better to show her how to do it. She will remember how if she actually watches you clean her child's teeth.

An even better way for a mother to learn is to let her clean her child's teeth while you watch. **A person discovers something for herself when she does it herself.**



Pick out a child and clean his teeth yourself. Let his mother watch.

Use a soft brush (or for a baby, a clean cloth). Gently but quickly brush or wipe his teeth. Do the best you can even if he cries.

If mothers make this into a habit, the child will expect to have his teeth cleaned and will soon cooperate—just the way he does to bathe or to have lice removed from his hair.



Now let each mother clean her own child's teeth. Teach her to clean on top and on both sides of every tooth.



Ask her to do the same at home each day. At the next clinic, look at the children's teeth and see how well the mothers are doing. Give further help when needed. Always praise and encourage those who are doing well.