

Behavior Supports



Creating a Behavior Support Plan

Sensory sensitivities, mouth-related trauma, boredom or many other reasons could cause challenging behaviors during daily mouth care. Creating a plan can help identify the reasons and create strategies to improve daily mouth care.



As a caregiver, you can use a behavior support plan to:

- Identify the reason for behaviors that are challenging or resistant to dental care.
- Help a person you support overcome fear about daily mouth care.
- Build cooperation to complete daily mouth care.
- Build self-help skills to complete daily mouth care.

A behavior support plan starts with a goal for the person you support. You can include the dental team, behavior support professionals and the person you support to choose an appropriate goal. Think about the skills and strengths of the person you support, along with any barriers to achieving the goal.

After you identify a goal, choose a behavior support strategy such as **adapting the environment**, **the ABC Model**, **desensitization**, **offering incentives** or **shaping**.

Adapting the Environment

The setting where a task takes place. Changing the environment is often an easy strategy to make daily mouth care sessions a success.

ABC Model

A way to improve behavior problems by understanding unwanted behavior and making changes before the behavior happens.

Offering Incentives

Using incentives to motivate a person to repeat a desired behavior in the future. Avoid incentivizing with sugary foods and beverages.

Shaping

Breaking a large task into small parts and offering an incentive to the person after they do a small task, which brings them closer to the desired step.







Desensitization

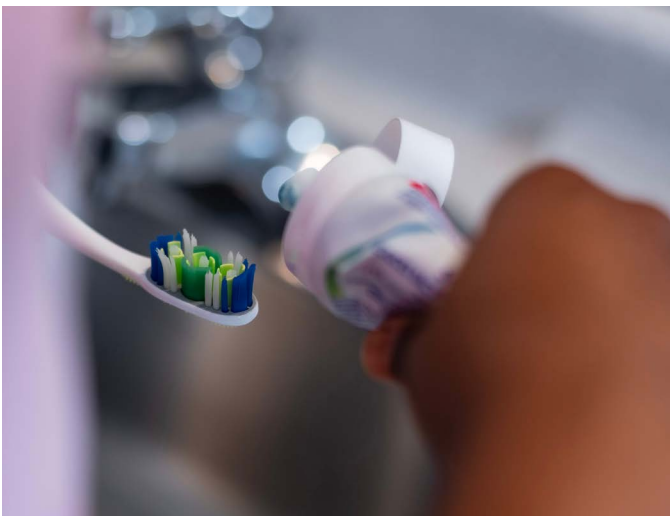
Breaking a large task into small parts and letting a person get used to each small part.



Create a Successful Environment

You can make a behavior support plan more successful by adapting the environment.

	Create consistent, predictable, agreeable routines around daily mouth care sessions.
	Find the right time of day. Mouth care sessions do not have to happen first thing in the morning or right before bed.
	Be responsive to the needs and interests of the person you support.
	Give choices. As an example: "Do you want to pause the show and brush your teeth now or wait until the show is over?"
	Stay present and engaged during mouth care sessions.
	Identify and reduce distractions or behavior triggers.



Daily mouth care sessions do not have to happen in the bathroom. Choosing a space with lots of light can make it easier to view the teeth and mouth. If the person you support cannot easily reach the sink or no sink is available, you can set out a cup or clean towel for them to spit into.

The ABC Model

You can use the ABC model to find the cause of behaviors that are challenging or resistant to dental care. Once you know the cause, you can make changes to prevent the behavior.



- 1. Awareness** - What happened right before the behavior started?
 - Knowing what happened will help you predict the behavior later.
- 2. Behavior** - Describe what the behavior is.
 - Knowing the behavior will help you think about how to adjust in the future.
- 3. Consequence** - What happened after the behavior? Did something happen that would make the person repeat the behavior again?
 - If a person feels rewarded for disruptive behavior, they are more likely to do it again later.

Desensitization

Desensitization is the process of breaking a large task down into small, incremental steps. Then, the steps are introduced one at a time. The next step is only introduced once the current step has been mastered. A person can move through the steps at whatever pace is best for them.

Desensitization includes:

- Gently introducing each step.
- Having time to build skills at their own pace.
- Feeling more capable of learning the next step.
- Building trust between you and the person you support.

Caregivers start by breaking a single task into a series of small steps.

If the person you support is feeling overwhelmed or struggling to master a step, break the series of steps down into even smaller steps.

Even a step as small as holding a toothbrush can be broken down. An individual can get used to holding a toothbrush by gripping a similar object like a hairbrush or holding a toothbrush outside of daily mouth care sessions.



Offering Incentives

Offering incentives encourages healthy behaviors using positive reinforcement for the benefit of the person you support. Offering incentives can reduce resistant behavior and increase cooperation. If you are offering incentives as part of daily mouth care sessions, it is important to choose incentives that are healthy. For example, sugar-free mints or gum are better than sugary treats that harm teeth. For more on incentives, watch the *Offering Incentives* video.

Other appropriate incentives could be:

- Going on a walk.
- Favorite shows or videos.
- Favorite songs.
- Special objects.
- Favorite game or activity.
- Spending one-on-one time with you.



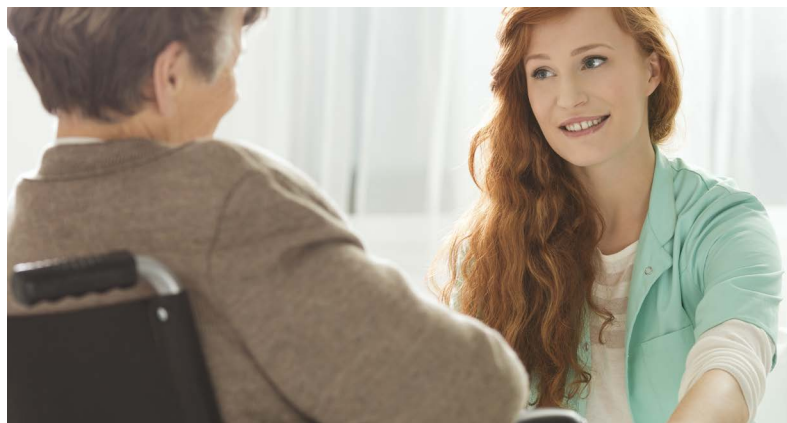
Genuine praise or a smile can be a powerful form of positive reinforcement. You should talk with the person you support to find out what incentives would motivate them.

Shaping

Shaping is a combination of desensitization and offering incentives. First, a large task is broken down into small, incremental steps. Then an incentive is used to motivate the person you support to complete each step.

1. Decide what goal and steps are appropriate for the person you support.
2. Reward the person after they complete a small step.
3. Begin to increase the expectation so they will need to complete multiple steps before receiving a reward. The expectation keeps increasing as the person masters more steps.
4. Eventually, the reward will only be given when the person completes the entire task.
5. Once the entire task has been mastered, you will reduce how often the reward is given.
6. Continue to reduce the frequency of the reward until the person you support will complete the entire task without expecting a reward.

As with desensitization, it is important to make sure you have appropriate expectations for the person you support. If they feel defeated or frustrated instead of motivated, then you may need to break the task down into smaller steps or offer a different incentive.



Examples of Shaping Goals

- Entering the bathroom for daily mouth care.
- Setting up a daily mouth care session.
- Holding a toothbrush.
- Completing steps of a daily mouth care session.
- Cleaning up supplies after a daily mouth care sessions.
- Entering the dental office.
- Tolerating a mouth exam.
- Brushing teeth.
- Flossing.



Motivational Interviewing: Behavior Supports

Better Conversations, Better Oral Health

Use these motivational interviewing (MI) strategies to talk about oral health with the person you support.



MI Strategy for the Person You Support

Use open-ended questions to learn about the reasons for behaviors that are resistant to dental care.

Example:

- “How are you feeling about brushing your teeth?”
- “When it’s time to brush your teeth, what could I do differently?”
- “Tell me how [an adaptation] made this better.”

Open-ended questions may not be right for the person you support if they are non-verbal and respond with mostly yes or no answers.



MI Strategy for Guardian or Family Member

Use reflective listening to keep the person engaged in conversation.

Example:

- “You realized that [person you support] gets distracted when they brush and floss.”



Adapting MI Strategies

Remember to keep the questions topic-focused.

Next Steps

These are additional resources that will help you and the person you support keep thinking about this topic after your conversation is over:

- [Task Breakdown Handout](#)
- [Adaptations, Positions & Behavior Support Handout](#)
- [Desensitization & Shaping Video](#)

