

By The Oral Health Forum

Improving Oral Health, Eliminating disparities

Funded by:

Wrigley Company Foundation,
Otho S. A. Sprague Memorial Institute
and the DentaQuest Foundation

Pearls of Truth

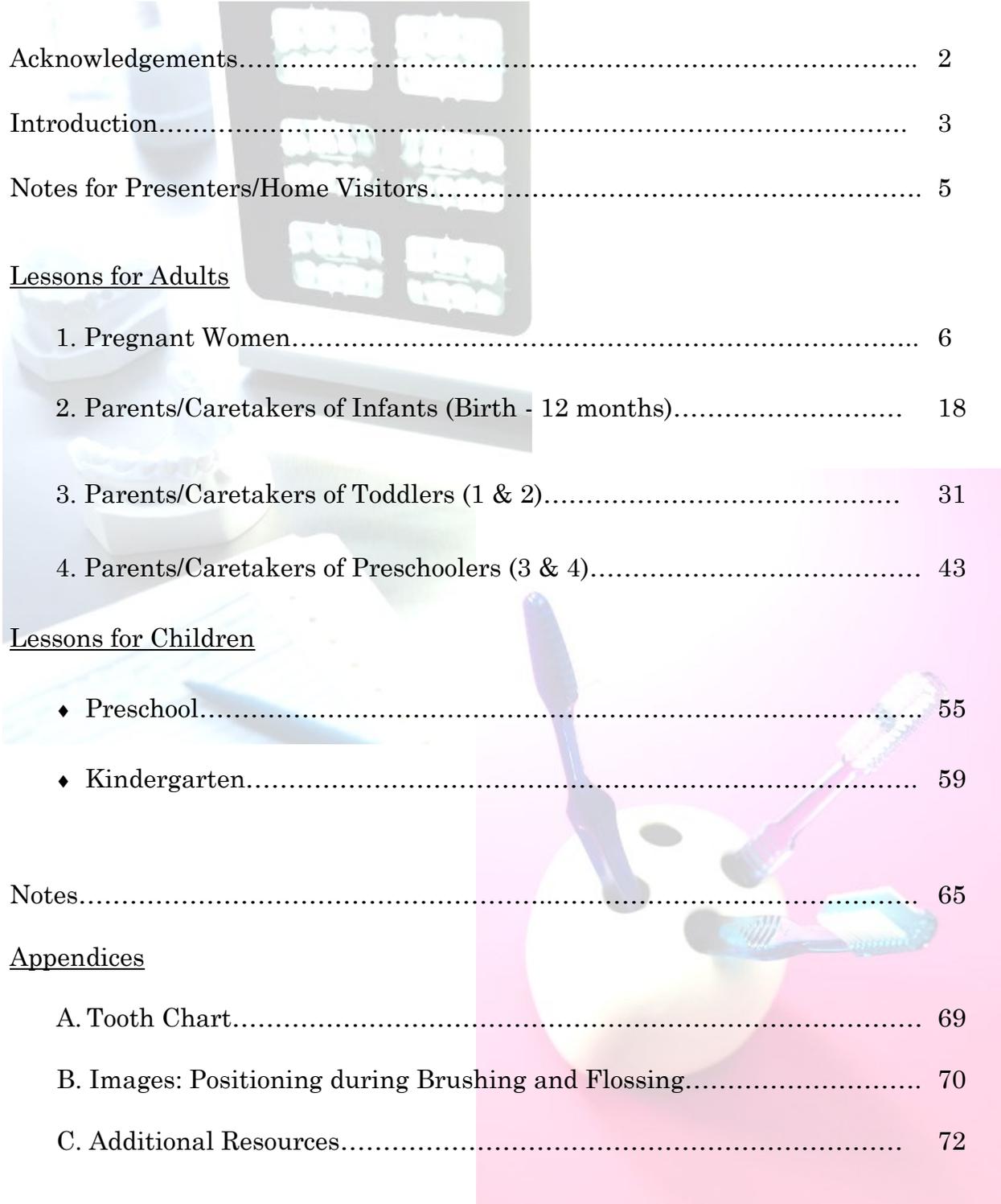
Oral Health from Birth to 5



Oral Health Lessons for Pregnant Women, Parents/Caretakers, and
Young Children by:

The Oral Health Forum

Table of Contents



Acknowledgements.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Notes for Presenters/Home Visitors.....	5
<u>Lessons for Adults</u>	
1. Pregnant Women.....	6
2. Parents/Caretakers of Infants (Birth - 12 months).....	18
3. Parents/Caretakers of Toddlers (1 & 2).....	31
4. Parents/Caretakers of Preschoolers (3 & 4).....	43
<u>Lessons for Children</u>	
♦ Preschool.....	55
♦ Kindergarten.....	59
Notes.....	65
<u>Appendices</u>	
A. Tooth Chart.....	69
B. Images: Positioning during Brushing and Flossing.....	70
C. Additional Resources.....	72

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and families in this country.



Introduction

Oral disease is a “silent epidemic” in our country according to former Surgeon General David Satcher.¹ In fact, dental disease is the most common childhood disease, five times more common than asthma and seven times more common than hay fever.² 51 million school hours are lost each year due to dental appointments or dental disease.³ Dental disease not only interferes with learning and work but also affects quality of life.⁴ In addition, certain populations are disproportionately affected by dental disease. The Surgeon General’s report states,

*Those who suffer the worst oral health are found among the poor of all ages, with poor children [...] particularly vulnerable. Members of racial and ethnic minority groups also experience a disproportionate level of oral health problems.*⁵

Professionals working in public health are all-too aware of the extent and gravity of the effects of dental disease. However, among people in the US, there is commonly a lack of understanding about the importance of preventing dental disease.⁶ Having such an understanding is especially important for caretakers of children be-



cause, while dental disease *is* the most common childhood disease, it is also the most preventable one. For these reasons, the education of parents/caretakers is imperative. To properly care for the oral health of their infant, toddler, or preschooler, the parent/caretaker must be educated about basic oral health care principles and techniques. Oral health education for pregnant women is also of paramount importance, both for the pregnant woman herself as well as for the child once it is born. Pregnant women must be educated about special considerations during pregnancy, as gum disease is linked to poor birth outcomes and poor oral hygiene can affect the child’s oral health once it is born. By providing parents/ caretakers and pregnant women with information on basic oral health care principles and techniques, we can start building a foundation for life-long oral health for their children as well as the parents/caretakers (or *soon-to-be* parents/caretakers) themselves.

(Continued on next page.)

(Introduction continued.)

The The Oral Health Forum (OHF) Oral Health Education Program, funded by the Wrigley Company Foundation, works to provide this kind of education to pregnant women and parents/caretakers of young children. With educational programming like that offered by OHF, expectant mothers and parents/caretakers can become equipped to help establish healthy habits that will last throughout their child's lifetime. They will be able to instill in their children a sense of why oral health is important: for disease prevention, overall wellbeing, and a high quality of life. Finally, in order to prevent dental disease, dental professionals must also teach young children themselves from an early age the importance of brushing and flossing their teeth as well as the proper techniques to do so, even before they are able to do these activities completely on their own. Of course parents/caretakers are taught to pass on their oral health knowledge to their children as well and establish healthy routines with their children. However, children also need to hear messages about oral health from people outside of their own family in order to have important points reinforced by experts and peers. Therefore, we have also included lessons for preschoolers and kindergartners.

OHF hopes that you will find this curriculum and accompanying training useful and beneficial to the populations that you serve. The writers have sought to present the content in a way that can be easily and creatively communicated. We hope that together we can continue to provide educational programming for those who need and want it, improve oral health, and eliminate disparities in dental health.



Notes for Presenters/Home Visitors

Presenters: Pregnant women and parent/caretaker lessons are designed so that they can serve either as lesson guides exclusively or as handouts for the pregnant women or parents/caretakers. The learning objectives are intended for the presenters. Also, the open-ended and close-ended questions at the end of each lesson can either be used by the presenter before the lesson, as a sort of pre-test, or after the lesson, for review. If you choose to ask the close-ended and open-ended questions orally rather than hand out those pages, please be aware that some of the questions are of a sensitive nature. Parents/caretakers may give answers that express variable levels of understanding on a particular topic of importance. Be prepared to handle all possible responses with kindness and sensitivity.

A note to home visitors (*You may wish to use these lessons as handouts too*):

As a home visitor, you have some unique opportunities that presenters to groups do not have in being invited into a family's home. This allows you greater freedom to personalize the lessons and tailor the content of the lessons to the particular circumstances and needs of the individual families that you visit. You may wish to ask the parents/caretaker who you visit to brush and floss the teeth of their child in front of you so that you can observe them. In observing parents/caretakers you create opportunities for hands-on learning in giving them more specific instructions and tips for brushing and flossing more effectively. Home visitors may also ask questions about how often and at what times the parents/caretakers wipe their child's gums or brush and floss their child's teeth.

Home visitors are trained to work with families on a very personal level. Using this strength-based training, begin by asking open-ended questions about the family's oral health routines. An example might be, "Tell me about how you help your child have healthy teeth." As you do in your other work with families, try to make them feel comfortable about opening up about their habits and routines. Home visitors are uniquely positioned to integrate their training on cultural sensitivity and family experiences into this oral health curriculum. As home visitors know, parents/caretakers have learned about how to care for their child from other family members and it may take some time for parents to embrace different oral health practices than what they have experienced. In order to help increase awareness of the importance of oral health care remember to integrate oral health lessons presented in this curriculum into overall health conversations you have with families.

