



**NC Department of Health and Human Services**

# **Finding a Dental Home: Strategies to Promote Positive Experiences for Children and Youth with Down Syndrome**

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# Objectives

- Discuss importance of oral health for children and youth with Down Syndrome.
- Share strategies to create a positive experience during a dental visit.
- Introduce ways to make brushing easier at home.



Photo Credit: R. Geer-Whole Child Health Section

# Oral Health Is More Than Just Teeth

- Oral health is an important part of overall health.
- Allows us to smile, speak, chew and digest food.
- Impacts self-esteem, social interactions, communication, and overall quality of life.

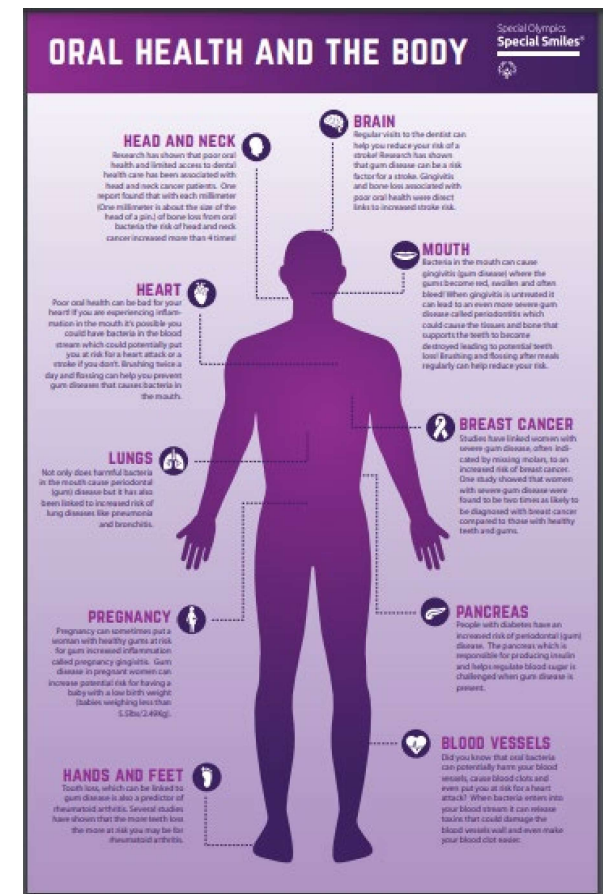


Photo Credit: Getty Images

# Oral Health Impacts Physical Health

- Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease among children.
- Oral health can affect a child's development.
- Oral health is also linked to other chronic health conditions.
- Reducing bacteria in the mouth benefits overall health.

Sources: [CDC Oral Health Website](https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/disease/dental_caries.html)  
[www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/disease/dental\\_caries.html](https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/disease/dental_caries.html)



<https://media.specialolympics.org/resource/health/disciplines/specialsmls/Special-Smiles-Oral-Health-and-the-Body-2019.pdf>

# It's Not Too Late!

ANY step toward improving oral health is a positive step, so start where you are today.



Photo Credit: Getty Images

# Oral Health and Down Syndrome: Developmental Factors

- Tooth development
  - Shape and size
  - Different tooth eruption patterns
- Shape of facial structures
- Tongue size
- Teeth may not be aligned properly

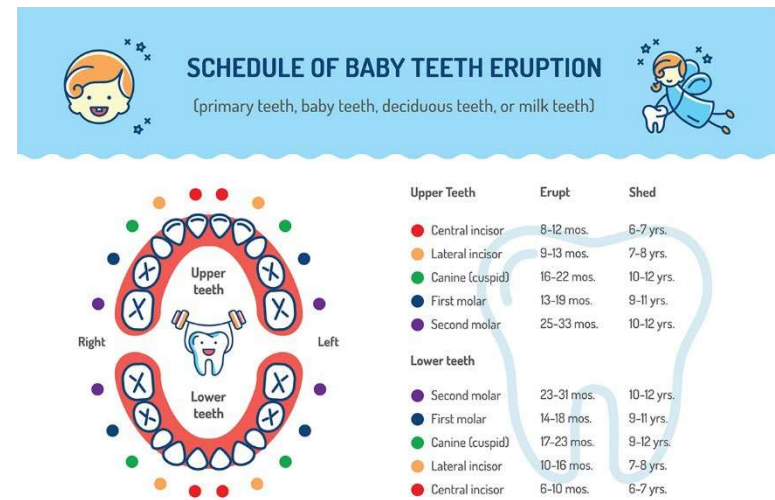


Photo Credit: Getty Images

Source: National Down Syndrome Society - [https://ndss.org/resources/dentisty-down-syndrome#p\\_722](https://ndss.org/resources/dentisty-down-syndrome#p_722) and [https://ndss.org/sites/default/files/archive/2017/11/oral\\_health\\_webinar.pdf](https://ndss.org/sites/default/files/archive/2017/11/oral_health_webinar.pdf)

# Oral Health and Down Syndrome: Additional Factors

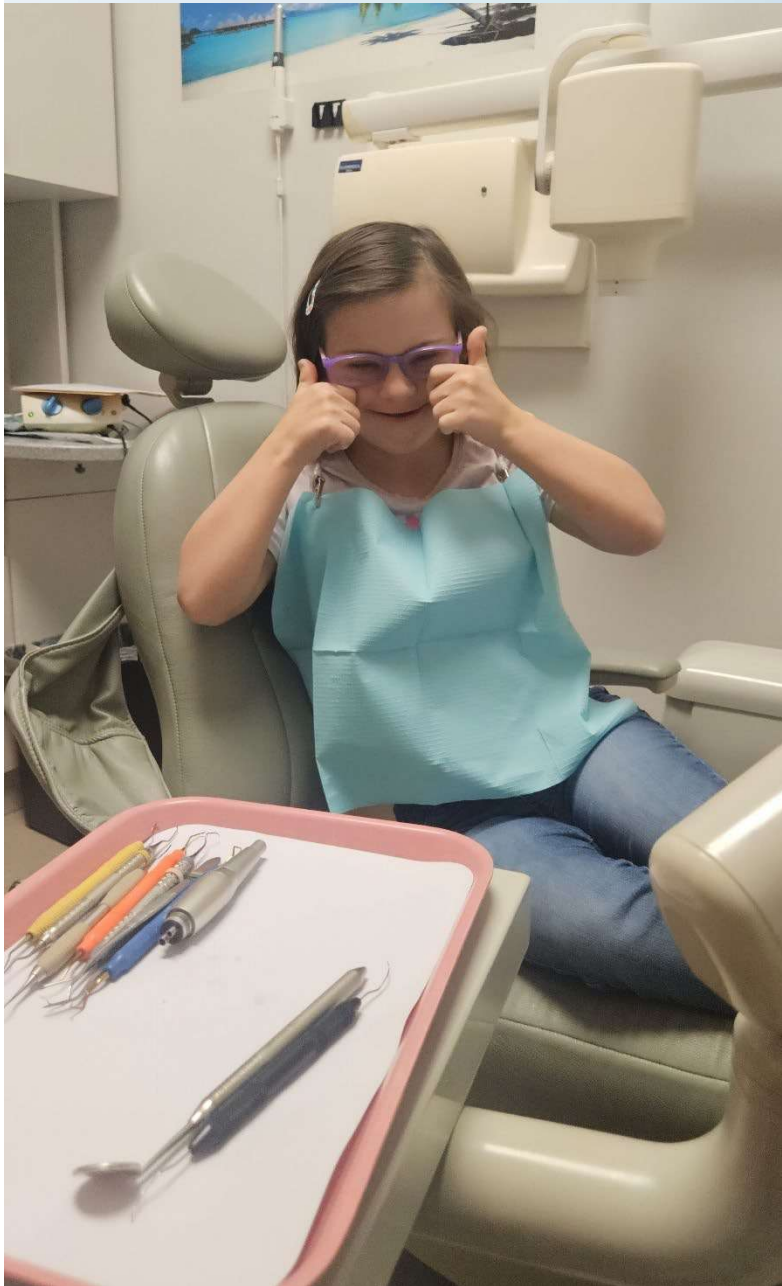
- Medications
  - Dry mouth
- Heart issues
- Low muscle tone (Hypotonia)
- Reflux
- Diagnostic overshadowing

Sources: National Down Syndrome Society - [https://ndss.org/resources/dentisty-down-syndrome#p\\_722](https://ndss.org/resources/dentisty-down-syndrome#p_722)  
and [https://ndss.org/sites/default/files/archive/2017/11/oral\\_health\\_webinar.pdf](https://ndss.org/sites/default/files/archive/2017/11/oral_health_webinar.pdf)  
Preventing Infection in Children with Down Syndrome - <https://www.downs-syndrome.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/DSA-Journal-141-Spring-Summer-DSMIG-pages.pdf>

# Steps to Promote Oral Health

- Brushing/Flossing at home
- Fluoride
- Sealants
- Nutrition
- Regular Check-ups

Photo Credit: B. Flick -Whole Child Health Section







# Strategies for a Positive Dental Visit

Photo Credit D. Beckmann -Whole Child Health Section

# What is a Medical Home and a Dental Home?

- A primary or regular clinic or provider.
- Both medical and dental homes are essential for your child's overall health and well-being.
  - Provides preventative care
  - Supports coordinated care
  - Knows your child
- Establish medical and dental home early.




Photo Credit: Getty Images

# Dental Home Checklist

## Finding the Right Dental Home

FOR YOUR CHILD OR YOUTH  
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS



Dental care is important because problems in the mouth can affect the health of the body. Children and youth with special health care or developmental needs should generally follow the same standards of care for children of all abilities. However, additional support may be needed. It is important to talk to your dentist about any physical or medical conditions, medications, allergies, and/or behavioral needs that may require some accommodations for your child. This checklist may help families have an ongoing positive relationship and experience with the dental care team for a life-long practice of healthy smiles!

**Instructions: Check the box if the dental office provides the service that supports your child or youth.**

	THIS IS IMPORTANT		WHY?
	Yes	No	
1. Does the dental office accept your insurance and have flexibility in payment plans if needed?			Payment options allow parent/caregiver to plan and budget for dental care either prior to or after the visit.
2. Does the dental office need any health history paperwork before the first visit?			It may take time to get medical records or complete forms.
3. Does the dental office offer scheduling flexibility to become familiar with the setting and staff?			This allows the family to see the office, meet the dental team and ask questions prior to the actual exam.
4. Does the dental office offer scheduling flexibility to support your child/youth's schedule and routine?			Children/youth who experience frequent medical needs, sensory or anxiety issues, or a range of appointments/therapies may need special scheduling considerations.
5. Is the dental office accessible to your child/youth in a wheelchair or with other mobility equipment (if needed)?			The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires dental offices to serve children, youth and adults with special health care needs and make accommodations for those using wheelchairs, walkers or any other mobility equipment.
6. Is the dental office able to provide communication support like Sign Language interpreters with enough notice before a visit?			The parent/caregiver needs to notify dental office about special communication needs like American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters or assistive technology, well in advance of visit.
7. Are you allowed to remain with your child/youth in the exam room?			The parent/caregiver's presence may reduce the child/youth's anxiety and increase their comfort with the dental care.
8. Does the dental office have a private exam room available?			A private exam room may prevent distractions or overstimulation of a child/youth with sensory challenges, anxiety, etc.

English



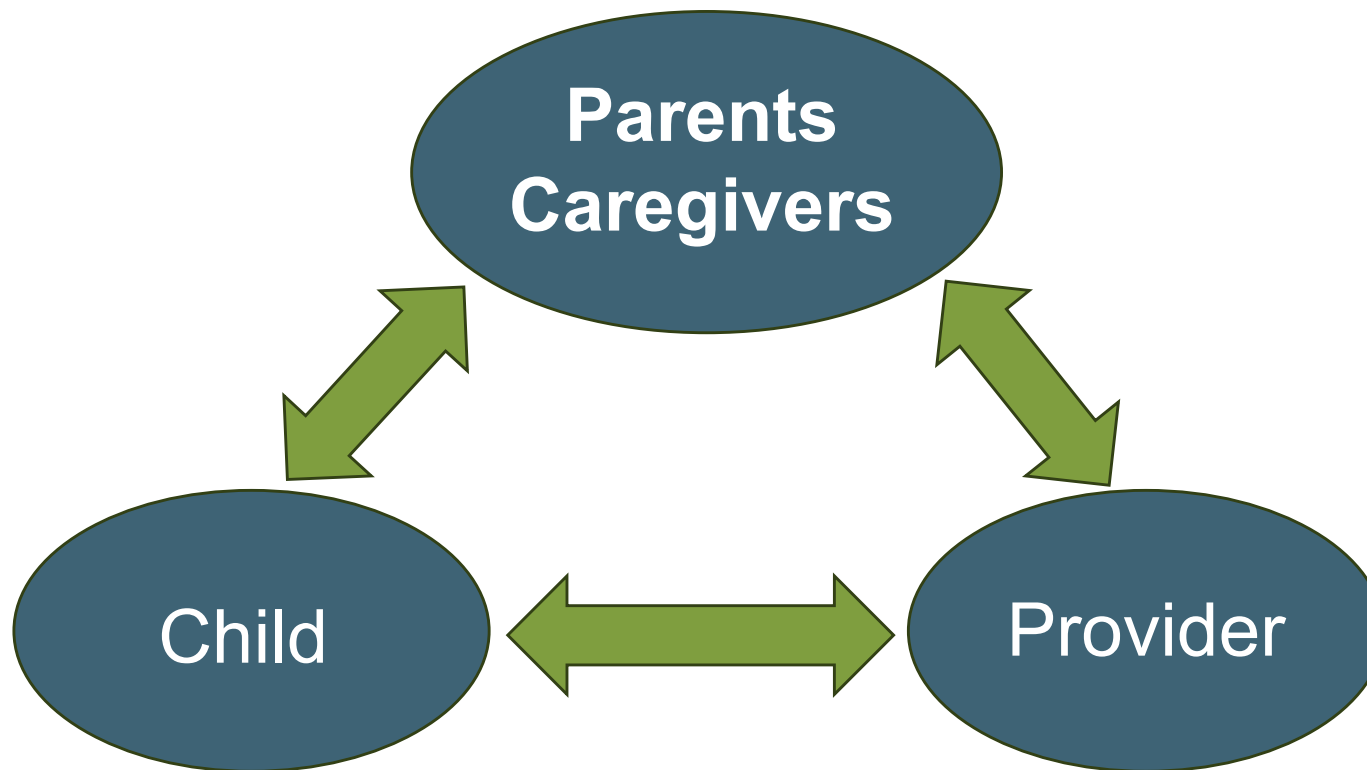
Spanish



# Pre-Visit Planning Tips

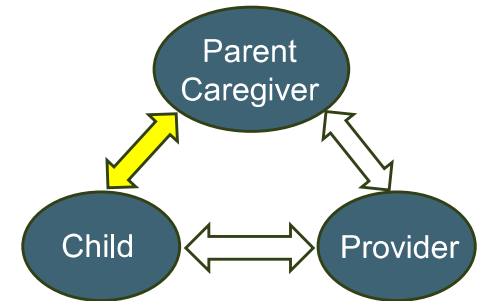
- Consider appointment times and schedule when best for your child.
- Complete paperwork online prior to appointment.
- Write down any questions.
- Consult with medical provider concerning any pre-medications.
- Make any requests for communication accommodations in advance.

# Communication is Key to a Positive Experience



# Preparing Your Child

- Utilize social stories.
- Look at dental office website for pictures or videos.
- Use calendar or other reminders to create positive anticipation.



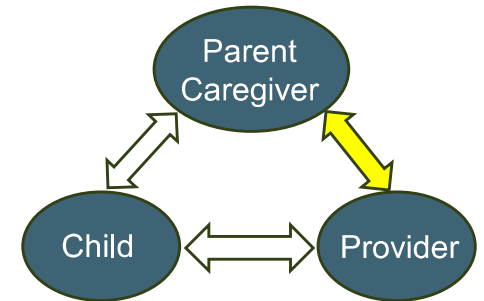
GOING TO THE DENTIST		
Today I am going to the dentist.	I will wait in the lobby until they call my name.	There is a play area in the lobby.
They have video games I can play while I wait.	When they call my name I will follow the helper to my chair.	I will sit in a big chair. It can go up, down, back and forth.

GOING TO THE DENTIST		
A dental assistant will be waiting to help me.	They will be wearing a mask, gloves, glasses and a special coat.	The dentist will use special tools to check my teeth.
The dentist may use a light to see my teeth.	I will open my mouth wide so the dentist can see my teeth.	They may blow air on my teeth or squirt water in my mouth.

GOING TO THE DENTIST		
They have a little straw to get the water out of my mouth.	Sometimes they may use a big straw to get the water out.	The dentist will use a special toothbrush to brush my teeth.
Sometimes they might use a special camera to take pictures of my teeth.	These pictures help the dentist make sure my teeth are healthy.	My teeth are all clean and now I am ready to leave!

Source: [https://www.eopd.org/hub\\_sites/lewis-lee/www/assets/uploads/files/Dental%20Social%20Storyboard.pdf](https://www.eopd.org/hub_sites/lewis-lee/www/assets/uploads/files/Dental%20Social%20Storyboard.pdf)

# Share Information About Your Child with Staff



- How they communicate
- How they show pain
- Sensitivities
- Trigger words
- Likes and dislikes
- Signals



Photo Credit: Getty Images

# Emphasize Positive Communication

- Ask staff to communicate directly with your child.
- Establish safe words.
- Use visual cues.
- Model descriptive positive reinforcement.

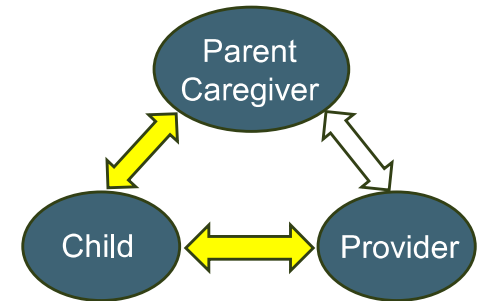
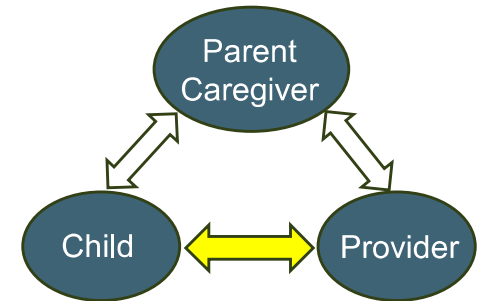


Photo Credit D. Krueger -Whole Child Health Section



# Utilize Tell, Show, Do Method



- 1. Tell:** your dentist explains to patient what they'd like to do
- 2. Show:** showing patient what is involved (e. g. showing the equipment and demonstrating it on a finger)
- 3. Do:** performing the procedure

# Create Familiar Environments

- Ask about an introductory visit.
- Request same staff and room, if possible.
- Bring comfort item.
- Utilize distractions such as videos, books, music, fidgets, etc.



Photo Credit: Getty Images

# Utilize Mouth Props or Other Supports

- Mouth props can make it easier to hold mouth open and minimize fatigue.
- Weighted blanket, stuffed animal, or X-ray apron
- Noise cancelling headphones
- Unflavored products
- Sunglasses

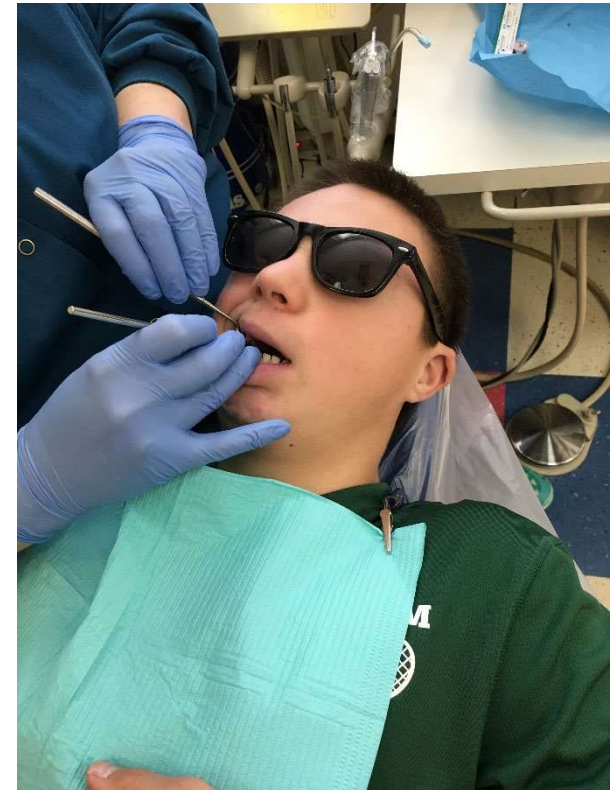


Photo Credit D. Beckmann -Whole Child Health Section

A photograph of a family in a bathroom. A man in a light green sweater is smiling and brushing his teeth with a white toothbrush. A young girl in a light blue shirt is also smiling and brushing her teeth with a yellow toothbrush. A woman with long brown hair is seen from behind, also brushing her teeth. The scene is brightly lit, likely from a window on the left. The text "Strategies at Home" is overlaid in the center in a large, bold, dark blue font.

# Strategies at Home

Photo Credit: Getty Images

# Q: Why are Brushing and Flossing so Important?

## A: They are the best way to remove oral bacteria.

- Bacteria in the mouth causes oral disease such as cavities.
- It is important to prevent cavities in baby teeth.

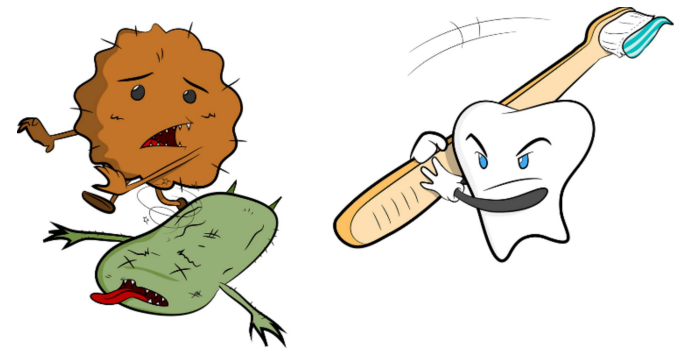


Photo Credit: Getty Images

# Not all Toothbrushes are Created Equal

- Every child is different, and you need to use a tool or technique that works for your child.
- Always use soft bristles.
- Smaller is better.
- Change toothbrush every 1-3 months or after illness.



Photo Credit: Getty Images

# Toothbrush Adaptations or Alternatives

- Surround toothbrush
- Modified handle on toothbrush
- Extra soft toothbrushes such as Summit
- Electric Toothbrush
- Toothbrush at 45-degree angle



Photo Credit: Getty Images

- **Source:**  
<https://ihdps.ku.edu/sites/ihdps/files/documents/7%20Oral%20Health%20Resources%20for%20Adaptive%20Aids--fixed.pdf>

# Tools for Home Care

- Timers
- Toothpaste options
  - Variety of flavors/unflavored
  - Non-foaming
  - Dye free
- Mouth rest
- Tongue scraper
- **Zero** alcohol fluoride mouth rinse



Photo Credit W. Schwade -Whole Child Health Section



# Role of Nutrition

- Sugar is the favorite food of bacteria that causes cavities.
- Carbonated beverages have acid that erodes enamel.
- Fruit juices have high concentration of sugar.
- Good nutrition is important for your oral health.



Photo Credit: Getty Images

# You've Got This!

- It's never too late!
- Any step is a positive step.
- You are the link between your child and the provider.
- Important to communicate unique aspects of your child.
- Your child's oral health starts with you.



Photo Credit M. Turner -Whole Child Health Section

# Resources

## National Down Syndrome Society

- Website contains information and resources specific to Down Syndrome and oral health.
- <https://ndss.org/resources/dentisty-down-syndrome>

## Advocate Medical Group – Adult Down Syndrome Center

- Website lists resources on dental care and Down Syndrome including links to videos and social stories.
- <https://adsresources.advocatehealth.com/resources/?category=Oral%20Health>

# Resources

## Caregivers Guide to Good Oral Health for People with Special Needs

- This guide was developed by Special Olympics' Special Smiles program and provides information on oral hygiene.
- <https://media.specialolympics.org/resources/health/disciplines/specialsmiles/Special-Smiles-Caregivers-Guide-English-Feb-2020.pdf>

## Adaptive Aids

- Booklet lists adaptive aids resources for oral health.
- <https://ihdps.ku.edu/sites/ihdps/files/documents/7%20Oral%20Health%20Resources%20for%20Adaptive%20Aids--fixed.pdf>

# DHHS Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs Help Line

**1-800-737-3028**

**Email: [CYSHCN.Helpline@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:CYSHCN.Helpline@dhhs.nc.gov)**

The Help Line is a free information and referral source for caregivers of and professionals who work with children and youth who have or are at risk for chronic physical, developmental, behavioral or emotional conditions, needing health services beyond the care that a child typically needs.



# Questions?

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