



Teeth Brushing & Autism

Autistic children are just a little bit harder to work with as a parent, with brushing teeth one of several top problems on the list. Many children with autism are hypersensitive, feeling things more thoroughly than the typically developing child. Tastes and smells can become too much. Meltdowns can become commonplace and severe. Parents in such a situation could become extremely frustrated themselves.

Parents do have problems a lot of the time about their autistic child's absolute impossible nature when it comes to having their teeth cleaned. Everything makes a difference and some tips are offered by parents who have faced the issue and come out alive and well...

- Take things slow; there is no need to rush through the process. There are no horsemen chasing you and an autistic child often requires more time than a typical child when learning to deal with something that might be bothering them terribly.
- Talk the child through it. Left, then right, over and over until it becomes routine.
- Count the strokes. When you give a definite amount to go for, there is a goal set. The child knows how much longer they must endure it, making it easier to go to the 'end'. They then know exactly when to switch sides, go up and down or back and forth etc.
- Give your child as much control as you can. When they get to decide times when to brush teeth, how many strokes to do, what toothbrush to use, what toothpaste to use, what stool to stand on, etc., things can be easier on both of you.
- Let the child do most of the brushing. No matter how terribly it works out, it empowers the child and lets him or her feel capable. You can always go over it afterwards.
- If the brush is a problem, opt out and go for a toothette with a sponge at the end instead of bristles or something else of a similar nature.
- If frothing toothpaste is a problem, go for one that doesn't froth or have a strong taste. If all else fails, keep to water and perhaps add mouthwash.
- Some parents recommend using a vibrating toothbrush as it counteracts the oral sensitivity and can provide the necessary stimulation.
- A soft washcloth is also a possibility for some children with oral sensitivities, as it is less abrasive than a toothbrush but get the same clean.
- Rewards for brushing are a good idea. However - be careful that they do not become dependent on it. It's a good idea to make it small rewards like a kiss or tucking in a special way instead of something you might not be able to have on hand constantly.
- Having a star/sticker system is also a good idea when it comes to rewards. Have a chart in the bathroom and give a sticker every time the child brushes his or her teeth. When it is filled up, you decide the best course of action.

- Play brushing games. You both brush at the same time, if you're brave enough, the child brushes you and then you brush back, number games, superhero games, the sky is the limit. When something is made fun for a child, they learn better, quicker and with less hassle. Be inventive, but base it around your child's interests.
- Sing a silly song that he can smile and laugh along with while brushing teeth. The process is thus made fun and things are done more hassle-free.
- Certain mouthwashes seem to dye the plaque a red colour, which can give an excellent visual for the children to tackle. Just remember that it MAY freak them out.
- Keep to a routine. That might include going to the bathroom, washing hands with soap, rinsing off, drying hands and then brushing teeth. If the child follows a certain routine every time, it is easier on both parties to follow through.

Every child responds differently to different stimuli. Figure out what it is that bothers your autistic child most and tackle them - one problem at a time. Tweak any of the techniques mentioned above to suit your autistic child's individual needs and you should be able to get those little teeth brushed up nicely in no time.

We wish you the VERY best in your endeavours! 😊