

## Tips to introduce a manual toothbrush (plain version)

Developed with Saskia Grassie, Children's Occupational Therapist

### Getting Ready

To help with new and challenging experiences, it's important for both your body and mind to feel calm and prepared. Check out the 'Getting ready to brush' section on the toothPASTE website for tips.

### Start in a sensory friendly environment

Introduce a toothbrush when they are happy and relaxed. Perhaps at bath time or include in a sensory play tub without the pressure to brush. Let them explore and interact with the toothbrush at their own pace. If they show interest, encourage their curiosity and join in with their play. Model what you want to do with a toothbrush on your own teeth.

### Make it fun

If your child isn't interested in the toothbrush at first, try leading the play. You could wrap it in a washcloth and make it pop out, or gently dance it up your arm, and then on theirs. Give the brush a playful kiss, brush it on your own cheek, and see if your child wants to copy you.

### Develop familiarity

Try having little conversations between two toothbrushes, like 'Hello, I'm Miss Pink, what's your name?' (You may need to do both voices). This can make the toothbrush seem friendlier and more fun. Try cleaning toys with a toothbrush and talk about cleaning- if the toys have teeth, even better! Play hide-and-seek, peek-a-boo or a memory game where you show a few things and then remove one. Hold the brush between your top lip and nose like a moustache and challenge your child to take it from you!

### Keep a toothbrush handy

Consider wearing clothes with pockets so you can keep a toothbrush handy for spontaneous play—or tuck one in your bag. Even a few seconds of playing with the toothbrush here and there can help your child get used to it.

This might be a quick process or take a few weeks or more to progress to tooth brushing. Even a few seconds of play and contact with a toothbrush every day will help make it more familiar.



## Manual toothbrushes: Tips for making toothbrushes more comfortable

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### Wider handles

Some children find skinny handles uncomfortable and 'wrong' to hold. A wider grip might be more comfortable and easier to use.

### Soft padding

If your child needs a softer grip, try adding padding to the handle, like a soft tube or a plain stretch fabric hair band wrapped around the handle.

### Stretchy covers

On wider handles, stretchy compression finger sleeves can help soften the grip. This can be helpful if your child needs to squeeze the handle hard.

### Additional sensory feedback

For children who need more sensory feedback, try using a toothbrush with a textured non-slip handle or adding rubber bands in their favourite colours. Supervise closely if using rubber bands and keep the brush out of reach when not in use, as rubber bands can pose a choking hazard.

### Appearance matters

Some children care a lot about how their toothbrush looks and might not want any extra padding or changes to the handle.



## Tips to help develop toothbrushing motor skills (Plain version)

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### Use a mirror

Brush your child's teeth in front of a mirror placed at a height where they can easily see themselves. This helps them understand what's happening.

### Make them feel stable

Ensure your child feels supported by helping them sit, knee, or stand comfortably. Support their bottom, back and feet. Some children will also need head support, and may find it helpful to rest their elbows on a surface to help with controlling the brush. See "Safe ways to brush" video

### Brush together

Let your child hold the toothbrush with you. Some parents find that their child likes to guide the toothbrush by placing their hand over yours, which can make them feel more in control.

### Make a video

Record a video of someone your child knows and trusts brushing their teeth in the same order that your child will follow, making sure they use the correct technique. As your child improves, update the video to reflect their progress.

