**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 during bath time or in a sensory tub, without pressuring your child to start brushing right away. Let them explore and interact with the toothbrush at their own pace. If they show interest, encourage their curiosity and join in the play.

**Make it fun**

If your child isn't interested in the toothbrush at first, try making it a game. You can wrap it in a washcloth and surprise them by making it 'pop' out, or gently tap it on their arm. Show affection by giving the toothbrush a 'kiss' or lightly brushing it on your cheek, and see if your child wants to copy you.

**Make brushing a game**

Try having little conversations with the toothbrushes, like 'Hello, I’m Miss Pink, what’s your name?' This can make the toothbrush seem friendlier and more fun. You can also pretend the toothbrush is cleaning their toys or sweeping crumbs off the table, explaining that it's a tool for cleaning. Games like peek-a-boo with the toothbrush hidden under a washcloth can add some surprise and fun. You could even 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 just a few seconds of playing with the toothbrush here and there can help your child get used to it and feel more comfortable with brushing.

This might be quick or could take a few weeks. Even just a few seconds of practice each day can help make the electric toothbrush feel more familiar. The vibration might not suit everyone. If your child gets too excited or upset, stop and ask for advice.



**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 easier and comfortable for your child to hold.

**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.

**Chew tubes**

Adding a chew tube over the handle can give more texture and weight, making the brush easier to hold.

**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.

**Appearance matters**

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



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

Developed with Saskia Grassie Children's Occupational Therapist

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 or stand comfortably. Support their bottom, back, and feet, or even their head if needed. Some also find it helpful to rest their elbow on a surface or lean back into you to support their head. 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.

