

Resistance to Care

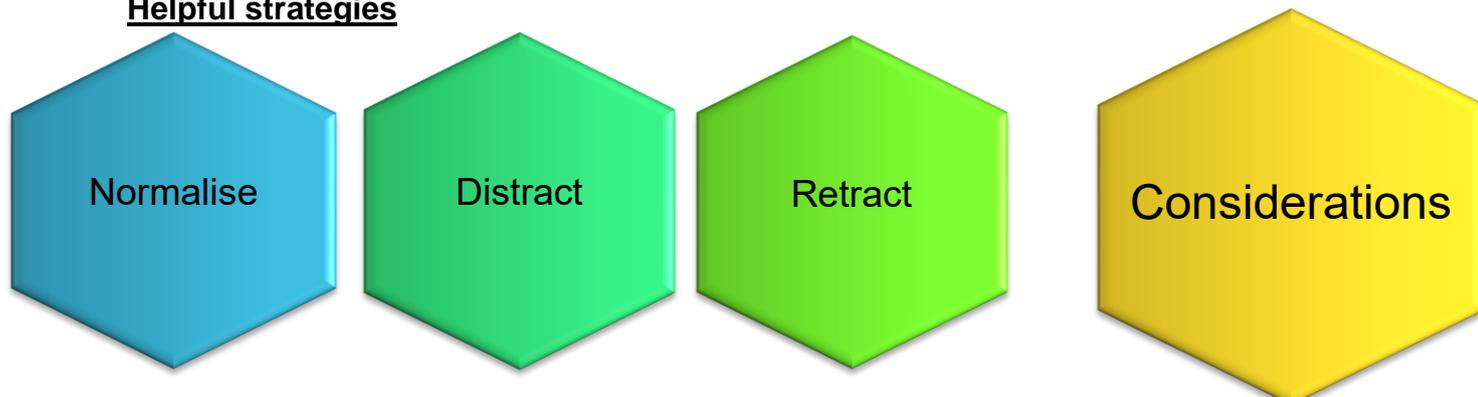
Some advice for carers on how to perform daily oral hygiene practices for someone else and how to overcome potential barriers and challenges.

What is it? (signs)

There are many reasons why a person might be resistant to others helping with oral hygiene practice such as interdental cleaning and toothbrushing. Individuals might feel threatened, they may have suffered oral trauma, there may be limited understanding of what a toothbrush is or why it's an important part of a daily routine. Some people will need assistance due to lack of dexterity, mental deterioration, stroke, mobility, low motivation and impaired perception.

It's important to remember some medicines slow or prevent the amount of saliva flow. Saliva is important for lubrication, comfort and swallowing. Some medicines contain sugar, it might be worth checking whether sugar free alternatives are available with the GP.

Helpful strategies



Normalising a behaviour can help empower an individual to realise it's not a threatening situation. Each person will have their own triggers and concerns. It's important to remember the mouth is a sensitive area and some will be intimidated or confused by toothbrushing. Below are some useful techniques to try, it could be trial and error until the correct methods are found. It's always worth trying!

- Start toothbrushing from a young age so that it feels normal to have help with brushing
- Watch a video of toothbrushing via YouTube – this could be at the same time as brushing or a different time
- Support workers/family can (if comfortable) take their own toothbrush to allow others to see brushing. After time ask the person to copy and brush together
- Use a mouth puppet or model and a toothbrush as part of a fun activity

Distraction can help alleviate anxiety. Examples of distraction techniques are:



- Using an app such as Brush DJ (<https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/brush-dj/>)
- Sing along to a song together. This will help put you both at ease whilst also making the task fun and enjoyable. It's nearly impossible to sing with a close mouth – this will help with toothbrush access and visibility.
- Brushing teeth in the bath is often easier.
- Consider a two person approach. One person would be calming, holding hands or encouraging the person whilst the other facilitates brushing/interdental cleaning
- Hand over hand technique is empowering, comforting and allows the enabler to have good control of the toothbrush if necessary.
- Rapport between the individual and yourself is paramount. Try not to damage good rapport, if things aren't working as planned take some time out and return later in the day.

Retracting the soft tissue (cheeks) will help with access and visibility. The idea is to help not hurt. Consider using the following items to aid retraction:

- The handle of a second toothbrush can be slid, gently, between the teeth and the cheek. The aim isn't to hurt the person, or to instigate the gag reflex, be careful and slow then introduce the brush for toothbrushing. It's also possible to use a small wooden or plastic spatula.
- A second toothbrush can also be used to help prop the mouth open whilst brushing and cleaning interdental. Allow the person to bite on the first brush whilst using the second to brush the teeth.
- Approach toothbrushing in small stages across the day, brush one area at a time.
- Ensure gloves are worn (latex free/nitrile) and use the fingers to move the lips if necessary. Be aware to stop if the person becomes agitated. Don't do this if the person is prone to biting down suddenly.
- A finger shield or guard can be used which will help protect your fingers.



Considerations:

- Position – try not to be overbearing or intimidating with your approach
- Ensure both yourself and the individual are comfortable. Brushing can be done standing behind the person with the head supported or from a seated position. Using a high backed chair can help support their head and neck.
- Explain what you are doing. Using a mirror can help too.
- Move to a window or use a light for good visibility
- Toothbrushing does not have to take place at a sink. If the individual has low mobility take the toothpaste, brush and a bowl to them.

- Using a 2-3 minute app or egg timer will encourage brushing to take place for the correct amount of time.
- Those with limited dexterity or grip strength can find toothbrushing difficult. Using a bicycle handlebar grip or foam tubing placed on a toothbrush handle makes it wider and easier to hold.



- Toothpaste that comes in a pump operated dispenser may be easier to use and enable independence.
- Some individuals may have experienced dental phobia or oral trauma in their past but are unable to let you know. Treating everyone with respect and having a gentle nature whilst being mindful will help greatly.
- Make toothbrushing fun and rewarding with a star chart. A chart is also a good way of enabling an individual to retain independence and monitor whether oral hygiene has been completed.
- A three sided toothbrush such as Dr Barmans or Collis Curve can help make toothbrushing easier.

Using a toothpaste that is unflavoured and does not contain SLS - a foaming agent called Sodium Lauryl Sulfate can be better to use with people who have sensory issues or those who suffer with a dry mouth. Oranurse toothpaste is one we would recommend.

- Massaging the lips and cheek before toothbrushing may relax the lips.
- If the toothbrush is clamped down upon leave it, don't remove it by force. Consider using a second brush to continue the task.

We have easy read leaflets at the Salaried Dental Service that explain toothbrushing, going to the dentist, tooth decay and gum disease. Ask the Dental Team for a copy.

Reducing care-resistant behaviour in oral hygiene Jablonski et al
British Society for Disability and Oral Health
Review: June 2023