

ARIZONA HEAD START ASSOCIATION



Early Childhood Dental Home Information for Families

Oral Health is a critical but often ignored component to school readiness. Early tooth loss caused by dental decay can result in failure to thrive, impaired speech development, chronic infection, bad breath, absence from and inability to concentrate in school, and reduced self-esteem. Did you know an estimated 51 million school hours per year are lost because of dental-related illness? (1. Community Voices: HealthCare for the Underserved, 2001). Children experiencing dental pain are distracted and unable to concentrate on their schoolwork.

Knowing that children are more likely to come to school ready to learn when they are healthy, Head Start in collaboration with the dental organizations in Arizona, is working collaboratively to ensure that every child in our state has access to a dental home. Young children are often unable to verbalize dental pain, so it is important to do routine, preventative visits with a dentist. Before the age of 1, a child should have had their first dental visit. Other services a child may need include fluoride and dental sealants as well as screening, referral and case management of dental care.

The Early Childhood Dental Home Project brings together early childhood professionals, families of young children, and the dental community to work together to ensure that children come to school with good oral health. Not every dentist has the expertise or desire to work with young children as part of their practice. This project will link you with dentists who not only know how to work with young children but are committed to building a relationship with you and your family as you work together to create an on-going system of oral health care for your child.

1. *Community Voices: HealthCare for the Underserved, 2001. Poor Oral Health in No Laughing Matter, Washington, DC: Community Voices: HealthCare for the Underserved.*