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The concepts of oral health care for young children in Taiwanese preschools: The viewpoints from a preschool administrator



KEYWORDS

Oral health care;
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Preschool teacher

Today, dental caries is the most common chronic disease among children in Taiwan.¹ However, Taiwanese people do not pay enough attention to oral health care, especially for children's teeth. Parents always hold the mentality that "the deciduous teeth will be replaced by the permanent teeth anyway" and neglect their children's oral health care, especially for the deciduous teeth.² In fact, the deciduous teeth have basic functions such as chewing, maintaining space, helping pronunciation, and promoting the sound development of the jawbone before teeth replacement. Therefore, oral health care for young children is very important. If a person fails to develop good oral hygiene habits from the early age, poor oral health may lead to a negative impact on his or her physical and mental development throughout the whole life. Furthermore, in addition to parents, preschool teachers are the earliest caregivers of young children. They can play a direct and active role in the oral health care and good oral hygiene habit development for young children.³ In this article, we searched and analyzed the concepts of oral health care for young children from the viewpoints of a preschool (also known as kindergarten) administrator.

In this analysis, we interviewed a preschool administrator in the southern Taiwan. From his viewpoints, we tried to summarize all the important activities about children's oral health care in the practice of operating a preschool, including those that had already been done or had not yet

been implemented but were considered important and worth planning for implementation, and then we interpreted their management modes and clinical significance in the oral health care for children. The results are shown in Table 1. We concluded 21 important items of oral health-related activities for children in a preschool in this study, including those that had already been done or had not yet been implemented in the investigated preschool. In term of activity attribute, the most common activities were oral health advocacy (n = 3), oral health care (n = 3), child protection (n = 3), and extracurricular activity (n = 3), followed by health education (n = 2), daily life education (n = 2), institution food service (n = 1), reading activity (n = 1), administrative cooperation (n = 1), preschool teacher training (n = 1), and parenting education (n = 1). Basic oral health knowledge, correct teeth cleaning concept and fluoride benefits would be taught in oral health advocacy, health education, and daily life education. A balanced diet with the reduction of refined starch and the use of fluoride-containing salt was considered in the institution food service. The preschool teachers provided primary oral health care for younger children, while external dentists provided oral examination, oral hygiene instruction, and topical fluoride application to teeth for all children. For child protection, it was necessary to avoid children from exposure to dental anxiety and seeking dental attention in time when children's oral problems occurred or were

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Table 1 Oral health-related activities for children in a preschool in the southern Taiwan.

Item	Activity attribute	Content	Management mode*	Clinical significance**
Oral health care activities that have already been done				
1	Health education	Teachers teach children about their own bodies, including an introduction to the structure and function of the oral cavity.	Type A	A
2	Health education	Teachers teach children self-oral health care, including teeth brushing and the use of cleaning tools.	Type A	B
3	Daily life education	Teachers usually instill in children the concept of teeth cleaning after eating and drinking.	Type A	A, B
4	Daily life education	Teachers teach children the concept of a balanced diet, especially increasing the intake of high-fiber foods, and reducing sugar-sweetened diets and beverages.	Type A	A, B
5	Institution food service	The group meal provided by the preschool is considered for the reduction of refined starch and the use of fluoride-containing salt, which is helpful for the prevention of dental caries for children.	Type A	B
6	Reading activity	The preschool provides children's picture books about oral health care and reducing dental anxiety when seeing a dentist.	Type A	A
7	Administrative cooperation	The preschool accepts the guidance of the competent authority and the publicity of the dental associations to cooperate with the implementation of the oral health policy for children.	Type C	A
8	Oral health advocacy	There are posters and sheets for oral health education displayed in the preschool.	Type A	A
9	Oral health advocacy	The preschool promotes the correlation between fluoride-containing products and dental caries prevention.	Type A	B
10	Oral health advocacy	The preschool promotes the habit of regular oral examination and treatment in the dental clinic.	Type B	C
11	Oral health care	Teachers directly help the younger children to brush and clean their teeth by demonstration teaching, and teach the parents about correct knowledge of children's oral health.	Type A	A, B
12	Oral health care	Dentists come to the preschool to provide children with oral examination, oral hygiene instruction, and topical fluoride application to teeth.	Type B	B, C
13	Child protection	The preschool avoids images or videos of dental anxiety or fear of dentists in the preschool.	Type A	A
14	Child protection	Teachers observe children's oral conditions in daily life, and remind parents to take their children for oral examination and dental treatment in time when children's oral problems are suspected.	Type B	C
15	Child protection	When a child has a toothache or a sudden facial trauma, the preschool will proactively help parents to take the child for dental treatment as soon as possible.	Type B	D
Oral health care activities that have not yet been implemented but are considered important and worth planning for implementation				
16	Extracurricular activity	The preschool arranges out-of-school activities for children visiting a dental clinic to let them know about dental treatment and reduce their dental anxiety.	Type B	A

Table 1 (continued)

Item	Activity attribute	Content	Management mode*	Clinical significance**
17	Extracurricular activity	The preschool participates in children's teeth cleaning activities organized by the government or dental associations.	Type C	A, B
18	Extracurricular activity	The preschool encourages children to participate in teeth cleaning competitions or oral health painting competitions organized by the government or dental associations.	Type C	A, B
19	Oral health care	The preschool invites a dentist to the preschool to guide children on how to use fluoride-containing mouthwash correctly.	Type B	B
20	Teacher training	The preschool encourages teachers to regularly participate in oral health training activities organized by the government or dental associations.	Type C	A, B
21	Parenting education	The preschool uses the activities such as parenting education or parent day to strengthen oral hygiene knowledge for parents.	Type A	A, B

*Management mode:

Type A: The preschool conducts oral health-related activities through its own teachers, staff, and facilities.

Type B: Oral health-related activities are performed by the preschool but require the assistance of a dentist or the resources from a dental clinic.

Type C: Oral health-related activities or publicities are organized by the government, dental associations or oral health-related groups with the preschool participation or cooperation.

**Clinical significance

A. To construct the correct concepts of oral health.

B. To cultivate the awareness and behavior of oral disease prevention.

C. To cultivate the habit of early detection and early treatment of oral diseases.

D. To promote proactive actions for dental treatment when oral disease is detected.

suspected. The purposes of extracurricular activities of visiting a dental clinic and participating in oral health-related competitions and reading activity of picture books were mainly to construct children's oral health concept and to reduce their dental anxiety when seeing a dentist. Preschool teacher training and parenting education for strengthening their oral health concept were also highly suggested. The preschool would follow the guidance from the competent authority to promote the oral health policy for children. Furthermore, in term of management mode, most of these oral health-related activities could be carried out independently by the preschool, followed by the assistance of dentists in activities organized by the preschool, and the participation of the preschool in activities organized by the government or dental associations. In term of clinical significance, most of these activities were to construct the correct concepts of oral health and to cultivate the awareness and behavior of oral disease prevention, followed by to cultivate the habit of early detection and early treatment of oral diseases and to promote proactive actions for dental treatment when oral disease was detected.

In Taiwan, dental caries is still the main disease of the oral cavity among children due to the long-term lack of awareness and behavior for oral health care among child caregivers.^{1,2} It is not difficult to construct a correct understanding of oral health, especially the good oral hygiene

habits cultivated from an early age are more important and can benefit people throughout their lives. Keeping the mouth and teeth clean, eating a healthy diet, and using fluoride-containing products for dental caries prevention are the basic principles to ensure oral health.^{4,5} Preschools and preschool teachers can play an active role in children's oral health care. With the correct concept, the preschools, preschool teachers, government, dentists, social support systems, and parents can joint together to maintain children's oral health. In fact, maintaining oral health is an important and natural thing to do from the early age of people. In addition, Taiwan has a mature national health insurance system and a comprehensive dental specialist system. Therefore, it is expected to establish a comprehensive oral health care guideline for our children from preschool onwards.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest relevant to this article.

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