

Module 2: “Going the Extra Mile for Tooth Protection” approximate time: 15 minutes

Key Message

In addition to daily dental health care, there are many ways that teens can protect their smiles.

Student goals

Upon completing this module students should be aware of additional ways that teeth can be protected and kept healthy:

- Recognizing and eliminating behaviors that can harm teeth, such as mouth piercing and tobacco use.
- Wearing mouthguards during active sports is important to protect teeth, mouth and face.

Module Topics (with discussion points and questions)

1. *Popular behaviors and bad habits that can damage teeth and health.* One of the toughest parts about being a teen is that you have to make choices that can affect your health, your appearance and your future. Some are just little things, like how you wear your hair, but some are decisions that can have a lasting effect on your life. We are going to talk about a few that are directly related to the health of your teeth and mouth.
2. *Trends and peer pressure.* Why is it so hard sometimes to make smart choices? [Comments may include: developing bad habits; the difficulty of going against trends or peer pressure; not knowing what the smart choice is; sometimes bad choices are more fun than good choices.] What are some choices that you may have to make — either now or as you get older — that can affect your teeth and mouth? [mouth piercing/mouth jewelry; smoking; chewing tobacco; eating too much junk food and drinking too much soda pop; not visiting the dentist; not using a mouthguard]
3. *Bad habits.* Let’s talk first about getting rid of a bad habit that many of us have — chewing on hard objects. Do you ever find yourself chewing on ice cubes, pencils and pens? Chewing on hard objects — even hard candy — can chip or crack your teeth. Your teeth are made to last a lifetime, but they are made for chewing food only! How can you break a bad habit like chewing on hard objects? [Put notes reminding yourself not to chew on things around your house and desk; ask friends to remind you if they see you chewing on stuff; chew more sugarless gum.] It’s hard to break bad habits, but you can do it! Recognizing that you have a bad habit is the first step.

**Don’t chew on hard objects like pencils,
ice cubes or hard candy.
Ask friends and family to help you break bad habits.**

4. *Tobacco.* There is another bad habit that is very dangerous, not only for your teeth, but for your mouth and entire body: using tobacco products. ALL tobacco is bad for your health, not just cigarettes and cigars. Smokeless tobacco, also called chew, snuff, dip or spitting tobacco, has become a very serious health problem for teens and young adults today. You know that smoking cigarettes can eventually kill you. You may not know that smokeless tobacco can cause mouth, tongue and lip cancer, and can be more addictive than cigarettes. Tobacco products also stain your teeth and cause gum disease and tooth loss. That certainly won't help your appearance any! Listen to these statistics: 1.) Approximately 28,000 people were diagnosed as having oral (mouth) cancer last year. Many of them probably thought they were safe because they used smokeless tobacco. Wrong! 2.) About 7,200 people will die from mouth cancer this year. AND – tobacco products cost a lot of money! Bottom line: There is nothing good to say about tobacco products. Never starting is your best defense against all the health problems related to tobacco.

Tobacco products are expensive and cause gum disease, tooth loss and cancer. BE SMART; DON'T START! AND SAVE MONEY, TOO!

ACTIVITY #4: Working in pairs, have the students write anti-tobacco-use slogans. Choose a class favorite and write it on a large piece of poster board to hang in your classroom.

5. *Mouth jewelry.* Let's talk about mouth jewelry. You might think pierced lips and tongues are attractive, or you might not, but you probably don't know just how dangerous these piercings can be. What do you think can happen to your teeth and mouth from piercings? [List on chalkboard: mouth sores and infections; chipped or cracked teeth; you can choke.] That's a good start, but it gets worse! Your mouth contains millions of bacteria, and infection and pain often occur with mouth piercing. Your mouth and tongue can swell up large enough to close off your airway. Piercing can also cause nerve damage and uncontrollable bleeding. You can choke on parts that come off in your mouth, and you can crack your teeth if you bite down on the jewelry. Mouth piercing is a decision that goes way past looking fashionable — it can have a big effect on your health!

Mouth piercing can result in infection, swelling, pain, choking, uncontrolled bleeding and cracked or chipped teeth.

6. *Mouthguards.* There is a good habit you can get into that will help protect your teeth from getting broken or knocked out. Does anyone know what I'm thinking of? I'll give you a hint. You use it for active sports. [Mouthguard.] That's right! A mouthguard. How many of you have ever worn a mouthguard? A mouthguard is a piece of soft, molded plastic that covers your upper teeth. Your dentist can make one that fits your teeth exactly, or you can buy an unshaped mouthguard that can be softened in boiling water and then shaped to fit over your teeth.

ACTIVITY #5: Mouthguard. Here is a picture of a mouthguard. Can someone explain to the class how it fits on the teeth?

Why is it so important to use a mouthguard? [Because if you lose your permanent teeth, new ones will not grow in to replace them.] Do you know anyone who has had teeth knocked out during sports? Will those teeth ever grow back? Mouthguards also help prevent injuries to your lips, face and jaw. Wearing a mouthguard is very smart even if you don't think it's a great fashion statement!

ACTIVITY #6: Let's make a list of all the sports and activities that we can think of in which your teeth and mouth might be injured. (Remember to include non-team sports such as skateboarding, gymnastics and rollerblading.)

Mouthguards protect teeth from injury and should be used during all active sports.

Your dentist can make a custom mouthguard, or a self-fitted mouthguard can be purchased at a store.

Summary: *In addition to the basics of good oral hygiene, smart teens avoid behaviors that can damage their health and appearance, and protect their teeth during active sports by wearing mouthguards.*

ACTIVITY #7: Have students work individually or in pairs to complete the activity sheet *Watch Your Mouth! Crossword Puzzle*. [You may wish to have copies of *Permanent Tooth Development* and *Tooth Anatomy* available as a reference.]



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