



Brush Up on Oral Health

Using Case Management to Improve Oral Health Care

Case management is a service provided by Head Start program staff. Case management is usually done by health and family service managers, family service workers, and home visitors. As case managers, Head Start staff can help parents find and access oral health care to help children be healthy and ready to learn. Case management is tailored to each family's strengths and challenges.

This Brush Up on Oral Health tip sheet defines case management and explains how it can help improve the oral health of children enrolled in Head Start programs. It also describes how case managers and parents can work together to meet children's oral health needs.



Case Management Defined

Case management is a process where case managers and parents work together to identify and overcome barriers to accessing and using health and social services. These barriers can include family belief systems and practices, health literacy challenges, and anxieties or phobias. Other barriers can include difficulty locating health and social services, no or insufficient insurance coverage, and lack of reliable transportation.

Head Start case managers can use the process to:

- Improve parents' problem-solving and self-management skills
- Help parents navigate the health care system
- Establish parents' role as primary caretakers of their child's health
- Build on and use parents' personal resources to overcome the unique challenges they face in accessing health services
- Promote evidence-based or evidence-informed care

Case Management Services

Oral health services can be included in case-management efforts. Some case-management services can include:

- **Assessment.** To decide if case management focusing on oral health is needed, Head Start staff determine:
 - If the child has a regular source of oral health care
 - If the child has had an oral exam within the timeframe stated in their state's [Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment \(EPSDT\) dental periodicity schedule](#)
 - If the child needs oral health treatment
 - If the child needs follow-up oral health services beyond an oral exam, such as fillings
- **Education and planning.** When working with families, the case manager can have a conversation with parents about the importance of oral health, regular dental visits, and follow-up treatment. Together, the case manager and parents can identify barriers that prevent the child from receiving needed oral health services. Then, the case manager and parents can work together to make a plan for ensuring that the child gets those services.
- **Assistance and care coordination.** Once parents and the case manager agree on a plan, the case manager can help parents overcome barriers to making the plan work. Assistance and care coordination services may include helping parents find oral health professionals, arranging dental visits, and enrolling children in dental insurance plans or identifying other resources that can help pay for oral health services. The case manager can also arrange transportation to dental visits and remind parents to go to their child's visits.
- **Tracking and evaluation.** Tracking and evaluation allow the case manager to determine whether the plan for ensuring that the child gets the oral health services they need is being followed. This allows the case manager to learn how well the process is working and if the child's oral health care needs are being met. One tool case managers can use to monitor whether a child's oral health care needs are being met is the [Head Start Oral Health Form](#) [PDF, 206KB]. The form is filled out by the oral health professional and is a record of oral health services delivered during a dental visit. It also provides information on what services still need to be completed.



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