

## Feeling Good About Your Smile Program Teaches Oral Health Skills

**Summary:** Feeling Good About Your Smile is a 90-minute hands-on workshop for improving oral health that is designed for people with intellectual/developmental disabilities and their caregivers. It combines a few simple and colorful slides with discussion and four activities that reinforce behaviors to improve oral and overall health.

In two sessions in Kansas, a certified dental hygienist led fun activities to teach participants about:

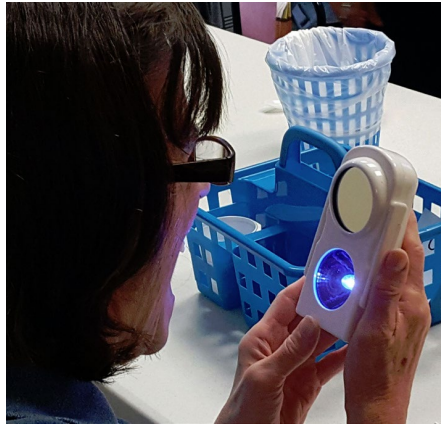
- Cavity-causing bacteria and how to remove them
- How to choose tooth-healthy foods and snacks
- Causes of cavities and the best ways to prevent them

**Challenge:** Although Kansans with disabilities can be healthy, data indicate that they currently experience worse health and have higher rates of health risk behaviors than their non-disabled peers. In the area of oral health, these disparities are especially striking. According to 2014 data from the CDC Disability and Health Data System (DHDS), significantly fewer Kansans with disabilities visited a dentist in the past year than those without disabilities (<https://dhds.cdc.gov/profiles>). In addition, 2015 BRFSS data (<http://www.kdheks.gov/brfss/>) indicate significant differences in the areas of dental insurance and dental care needed but not received.

Oral Health	With a disability	Without a disability
No dental insurance	46.0%	28.7%
Needed dental care in last 12 months, but did not get it	24.8%	9.3%
Visited a dentist in the last year	54.3%	71.0%

**Solution:** Dental hygienist Kathy Hunt from Oral Health Kansas, who developed “Feeling Good About Your Smile,” led two workshops in May, one in Olathe and the other in Parsons. Sessions were limited to 10 individuals and their personal assistants (a direct support worker, caregiver, or other person who works with the consumer on independent living and can reinforce the oral health behaviors learned in the workshop after it is completed), for a total of 20 per workshop. Ms. Hunt has found that having these individuals participate in the workshop with consumers is crucial to the outcome of improving oral health for people with intellectual disabilities.

- In Parsons, 20 people attended, 8 males and 12 females, ranging in age from 19-60.
- In Olathe, 8 people attended, 4 male and 4 female, with an age range of 22-64.



Dental hygienist Kathy Hunt (*left*) discusses the way foods affect oral health. At right, a participant in the program uses a black light to check her tooth-brushing skills.

The workshop covers: how to correctly brush your teeth, how much toothpaste to use, why acid harms teeth, which foods cause acid attacks, and how to floss. Participants practice tooth brushing and use a black light to see how well they have brushed.

**Results:** In questions about behavior pre- and post-workshop, the number of participants who said they would practice healthier behaviors to improve and maintain their oral health increased in both sessions. These desirable behaviors are (1) brushing their teeth every day and (2) choosing to drink water when thirsty (versus milk, energy/sports drink, fruit juice or soda pop). Participants were less certain about the best way to drink a sugary drink (“all at once” versus “sipping throughout the day”).

There were also increases in knowledge about oral health from pre- to post-workshop. The knowledge assessment used pictures to ask some of these questions (with answers given here in parentheses):

- What amount of toothpaste should you use to brush your teeth? (Pea-sized)
- Do all people have germs in their mouth? (Yes)
- Can a cavity make your teeth hurt? (Yes)
- Circle the foods that can cause cavities. (Candy bar, juice, cookies)

## Sustaining Success

This hands-on workshop is designed to be replicable for use by all organizations that serve adults with disabilities to provide education and support for activities that lead to better oral health.

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