Oral Motor Activities

Oral motor control is important for many activities such as managing secretions, speech, feeding etc. The face, mouth and tongue are made of many small muscles. Sometimes these muscles are not strong enough and your child may struggle to close their mouth or keep their tongue in their mouth. Sometimes the mouth can be hypersensitive and children do not like their face or the inside of the mouth to be touched. This can result in the child being a fussy eater and avoiding foods which cause pain or require more muscle effort. Sometimes children are under responsive in the mouth and seek extra sensory input in the form of chewing non-food objects e.g. clothes, pencils etc.

The following are activities which can promote oral motor control/awareness:

[ ] Dots around the outside of the mouth – using your index finger press firmly on a spot around the mouth then take your finger off and repeat further along until you have gone all around the mouth. Repeat three times

[ ] Facial massage – Use firm pressure to massage the cheeks in small circular movements. Repeat three times

[ ] Wake the mouth up – Use a vibrating / electric toothbrush and brush across the tongue. Move the back of the vibrating toothbrush along the outside of the cheeks.

[ ] Blowing – Blow toys may assist to increase oral-muscle-tone and awareness of the mouth. Some examples include: harmonicas, blowing bubbles, pin wheels, hooters, balloons, ball blowers, whistles, blow pens. Other games include: blowing through a straw in the bath into soapy water to make bubbles, blowing a ping-pong ball through a straw around an obstacle course etc.

[ ] Sucking – Use activities that use suck e.g. suck up cotton wool balls using a straw, drink thick liquids (e.g. milkshakes, yoghurts etc) through a straw, drinking from a sports bottle etc.
[ ] **Facial exercises** – Pull funny faces at each other. Open the mouth as wide as possible. Blow raspberries at each other. Stick the tongue out etc.

[ ] **Bite and tug** – Using theratubing bite down on the molars and pull, do this ten times then repeat on other side of the mouth.

**Cheek exercises**
[ ] Put lips together and puff cheeks out. Hold for 10 seconds whilst breathing in and out of the nose
[ ] Puff one cheek out then the other
[ ] Use the tongue to push the cheek out

**Tongue exercises**
[ ] Stick the tongue out as far as possible
[ ] Place a finger or toothbrush in front of the mouth and use the tongue to push the finger/brush as hard as possible. Gradually increase the distance of the finger/toothbrush
[ ] Place a finger at the side of the mouth and push tongue against the finger, repeat on the other side
[ ] Move the tongue over the front teeth left to right then right to left. Repeat this at the back of the teeth.
[ ] Complete the above with the bottom teeth
[ ] Stick the tongue out and place a raisin on the end then curl the tongue up to take the raisin into the mouth
[ ] Move a raisin or piece of food from one side of the mouth to the other

Try practicing the above activities in front of a mirror to enable your child to see how their mouth and tongue works.

Complete the activities ________ a day

Picky/fussy eaters may benefit from oral motor activities being completed prior to mealtimes and brushing teeth.

Many times, when we are feeling anxious, nervous, or overwhelmed, we regulate, this feeling by using our **proprioceptive sense**. This sense involves muscle and joint position information. It tells us how much force to exert during a task. It is also important because it can help us to modulate our other body systems when we feel anxious, excited, or nervous; in other words, when our engines are high.

Many children use their proprioceptive system to help them get through the many demands of the day. The best way for them to activate their proprioceptive system is through their **mouth** – you have the highest number of sensory receptors in your mouth, and thus this is the most efficient way of getting this system’s
regulating benefits. When children start to exhibit signs of this regulating system by mouthing or chewing on things, their behaviour is telling us that they are **working hard** and have found a **successful strategy** to help them complete the presented task.

Try the following oral motor ‘food’s to see how it affects your child’s level of alertness.

- **Sour** = Lemon, sour starbursts
- **Sweet** = Digestive biscuits, peaches, chutney
- **Spicy** = Salsa, Pepperami sticks, BBQ sauce, Bransten Pickle
- **Salty** = Pretzels, salt and vinegar crisps, ready salted crisps
- **Crunchy** = Carrots, apples, celery, MM’s
- **Chewy** = Chewing gum (2-3 pieces), Bagel, tracker bar, liquorice, drumstick lollies
- **Licking** = Lollipops, icepops
- **Sucking** = Water bottles, straw, boiled sweets, foxes glacier mints
- **Biting/pulling** = Liquorice, celery, pepperami, gummy worms

Use foods as snacks or when your child is over or under aroused. Chewy crunchy foods are often calming and can be used at transition times e.g. on coming home from school, going out etc.

Children who seek oral motor input (chewing, biting non-food objects) may benefit from using sensory chew toys to give them the sensory input they crave. Below are various websites/companies that sell sensory oral motor items.

- [www.chewygem.co.uk](http://www.chewygem.co.uk)
- [www.chewelry.co](http://www.chewelry.co)
- [www.chewytubes.com](http://www.chewytubes.com)
- [www.sensorytoywarehouse.com](http://www.sensorytoywarehouse.com)

Google oral sensory items for a variety of products and price ranges

If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact the department on 01706 676320