

Introduction

Build your organization's capacity to connect adolescents to essential dental services. This Spark mini-training outlines adolescent dental health & referrals.

Objectives

By the end of this Spark training, participants will be able to:

- Identify the importance of dental care in adolescents
- Strengthen or develop their dental referral process for adolescents

Supplies

Prepare these supplies prior to facilitating this Spark.

- Laptop
- Projector

Additional Resources

If you or your colleagues would like to learn more about this topic, take a look at these additional resources.

- [Structuring Referrals to Dentistry Implementation Guide](#)

Citation

If you plan to modify this resource, please cite or credit as: "Referring Adolescent Patients to Dental services" Spark Training developed by the Adolescent Health Initiative at Michigan Medicine; September 2018; Ann Arbor, MI.


Key of Icons

 = Slide change  = Estimated duration of topic  = Script for facilitator  = Note for facilitator


Intro/Hook  (3 minutes)

 **1 – TITLE SLIDE**

 Introduce yourself/yourselfes.

 Today we’re going to do a 15-minute mini-training, also called a Spark, which is intended to “spark” discussion and learning. This Spark is focused on adolescent dental health & referrals. When thinking about referring young people to health services, oral health care may not be the first thing that comes to mind, but we have the opportunity to reinforce the importance of dental care for adolescents in some quick and easy ways.

 **2 – BRAINSTORM**


 We’re going to start with a quick brainstorm.

How might it feel to visit the dentist as a teen?

Feel free to share your personal experiences if you visited the dentist when you were a teen

[Give a few moments for participants to respond. Consider sharing your own reflection. If people don’t have much to say, you can ask: What might make a visit to the dentist different for a teenager than an adult or a child?]


 **3- BRAINSTORM**

 Next, let’s take a moment to think to ourselves about possible reasons why teens may avoid going to the dentist.

[Allow time for responses]

The purpose of this activity was to help us think back to our own experiences as young people, and to remind ourselves that it might take special effort for us to meet their needs as we provide patient-centered care.

 **4 – ORAL HEALTH CARE EXPERIENCES**

 What might happen when teens don’t feel comfortable with their oral health care experience?

[Allow time for responses]


 5 – ORAL HEALTH CARE EXPERIENCES

 What might happen when teens do feel comfortable with their oral health care experience?


[Allow time for responses]

In the next few slides, we are going to read some quotes from teen patients about their experiences at dental visits. After each slide, think to yourself how each young person might feel about going to the dentist.


 6 – CICILY

 The following story is from Cicily at age 17. “My mom recently reminded me that I need to schedule my next dentist appointment. I thought I would have to call and actually talk to someone, I wasn’t looking forward to that! But they have online scheduling on the office website! That made everything so much easier.”


 7 – DANTE

 “Dentists can sometimes be like robots, just going through the process. There is not much conversation with the provider, and when they do ask questions, it’s when they are in my mouth. I don’t feel like there’s a personal relationship at all.” - Dante, 15


 8- TONI

 “I feel very anxious about my dental appointments. I’ve had some unpleasant experiences, the dentist always tells me all the things I’m doing wrong, like not flossing, or questioning my eating habits. I rarely ever look forward to appointments.” –Toni, 19

 9- DORIAN


 This quote is from Dorian, at age 13. “My dentist office is really cool! They do a “cavity free” month activity- they put your name into a drawing if you have no cavities, and they pull a name to win a \$100 gift card!”

 10 – ORAL HEALTH IN ADOLESCENCE

 Now that we’ve heard some individual perspectives, let’s look at the bigger picture. Dental care has is the most prevalent unmet health need in US youth. According to the CDC, dental caries, or cavities, remain the most common chronic disease of young people, affecting 59% of adolescents ages 12-19.

As we know, many oral health conditions, including cavities, are largely preventable with regular visits to the dentist for oral exams, professional cleanings and education.

 11- THE NEED


 Let's review some data related to oral health in the U.S. There are 4 items, 3 are fill in the blank, and one is multiple choice. I will read each item aloud, and I'd like you all to either fill in the blank for the statement, or answer the question that appears. Feel free to say your answers aloud.

[\[Click through the slides so that the questions and then answers appear.\]](#)

[\[Read the statement on each slide, then read the following additional information\]](#)


1. Decayed teeth can cause pain in the mouth that affects adolescents' ability to focus during the school day. Youth who have poor oral health are three times more likely to miss school due to dental pain, and receive lower grades than children who don't
2. Untreated cavities can cause pain and infections that may lead to problems with eating, speaking and being active.
3. All of these diseases can be detected orally, and teens who visit the dentist regularly have a better chance of early diagnosis and treatment.
4. The physicians in this study identified the lack of an adequate dental referral process as the reason for low referral rates.

 11 – MAKING A REFERRAL GUIDE

 One important step to referring young people to dental services is making a referral guide. Consider developing a list of providers and resources that young people may need to access dental services. The list can be vetted by organization leaders and community partners. It may also be a good idea to designate people in your organization to reach out to local dentist offices to build rapport and set up a referral process.

Another key part of having a referral list is to make sure it is visible and accessible to those who may need it. The list is only effective if people know about it and can easily access it!

 12- TEEN- FRIENDLY PRACTICES


 An important aspect of identifying providers is to assess the youth-friendliness of the practice. A nice way to do this might be to ask youth if they have suggestions for dentists they have visited. Your team could also designate someone to assess the youth-friendliness of local dental offices. Here are some examples of what a youth-friendly dental office might be like:

1. Offer services that are accessible to youth. This includes flexible scheduling hours, an up-to-date website, and the option of same-day appointments.
2. Create a welcoming environment for young patients: have magazines for teens, cell phone charging stations, and easy to understand forms.
3. Use strengths-based approaches to care, where providers acknowledge healthy behaviors and encourage youth.
4. Encourage adolescents to return for follow up care, and offer text reminders to adolescent patients for upcoming appointments.

5. Collect feedback from adolescent patients by asking adolescent patients to complete patient satisfaction surveys about their experience.

It is important to note that all dental practices may not implement all of these strategies at their offices, and that's okay! The most important thing is that the office makes young people feel welcome and valued.

10 – HOW WILL WE HELP


 Let's close by thinking about what we can do to encourage youth to take charge of their dental health.

[Click to reveal prompt on slide.]

What can we do to make or strengthen our dental referral guide?


[Give participants a little time to discuss. Report out if time.]


[Click to reveal next prompt on slide.]

 Thinking back to our earlier discussion on challenges young people face, what are some ways we can help them get to the dentist?

[Give participants a little time to discuss. If time report out.]

13 – THANK YOU!

 To keep this conversation going over the next month, I will share Sparklers, or case scenarios, that relate to referring adolescent patients to dental services. I'll post the Sparklers around the office in places that you all can easily see them. When you see a Sparkler, take a moment to read the scenario and think through the questions listed on the page. Thank you for your participation!

 Print and post Sparklers in areas your staff can see (e.g., lunchroom).