

## **INTRODUCTION**

Keep Smiling – Working Together, is an oral health promotion programme designed by dental professionals, working together with parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to help keep their teeth healthy and make dental visits easier for the whole family. In keeping with this year's conference theme "Advocacy for Better Oral Health", this programme aims to help young children with ASD and parents create good oral health practices and positive experiences.

## **BACKGROUND**

About 1 in 100 children worldwide have ASD (World Health Organisation, 2023). For children in this cohort oral health can be impacted by things like sensory processing sensitivities, communications difficulties, restricted diets and behavioural issues (Sami *et al.*, 2023). Early visits to the dentist and hygienist can help prevent tooth decay. However, these visits can be overwhelming due to sounds, smells and bright lights. These visits can also be daunting for parents. Keep Smiling – Working Together aims to guide parents on not only the importance of good oral health but also on how to go about making these appointments in the best way possible and to prepare their child on what to expect from their first dental visit. When health care professionals collaborate with parents and patients, families are better able to act on the advice, resulting in improvements in the child's health and well-being and behavioural outcomes (Glascoe & Trimm, 2014).

## **AIM**

To provide instructions to parents on how to prepare their child with ASD for a dental visit and increase awareness of the importance of oral health and preventative care.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- Through our infographic campaign, provide helpful instructions to parents of children with ASD on how prepare their child for a dental visit and encourage good oral health practices.
- By providing tips on things to consider before booking a dental appointment, making this process easier for the parent.
- Empower both parents and their children to gain greater control over the child's oral health by being involved in the process.
- By involving parents in the pre-appointment stage and by using the information, the practitioner gains a wealth of information on the child, helping to lead to a better dental experience.
- Create a cost and time effective oral health infographic campaign.
- On reviewing evaluations post appointment, update content if necessary and review if participants have found it helpful.

## **MATERIALS**

**Infographic** - Presenting an infographic can be an effective way of delivering the message of a health campaign in an easy-to-read and visual manner. A well-designed infographic can help engage conversation and let you get your point across to as many people as possible in a cost-effective manner.

The infographic will be designed in 4 Steps;

1. Making an appointment
2. Preparation Starts at Home
3. Social Stories and Picture Books
4. At Home Care

**QR Code** – A QR Code will be added to the poster which will bring people to a landing page containing useful links for parents such as brushmyteeth.ie and other such resources.

**Evaluation Questionnaires** - After participation consent is obtained, questionnaires will be given to parents to fill out post appointment. This questionnaire will allow us to gather information from parents as to whether the campaign was helpful in creating a better dental experience, use of at home preparation was used and if so, was it helpful and regarding home care. Also, there will be feedback questions. On evaluation of this any changes required will be updated and the date gather use to see whether the initiative has achieved its objectives.

### **Methods**

The pilot project will focus on targeting children with ASD (approx. 50) who will be attending our clinics for the first time, over a 6-month period. After participation consent from the parent, we can send the infographic via email or have it on our website to be downloaded. At a later stage if the pilot is successful, posters will be created for private practices and ASD services to avail of, and feedback can be gathered through a QR code feedback system.

By using the Model of Improvement, we can use Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycles which will allow us to test out small changes in how we deliver our campaign and then build on them. PDSA's will allows us to learn from ideas and establish what will or will not be successful.

### **Cost At Roll out Stage**

Graphic design = €200

Stationary (paper, postage, envelopes etc) = €100

Total = €300

### **Discussion**

Dental decay is the most widespread noncommunicable disease (WHO, 2017). People of all ages are at risk to dental decay but more vulnerable groups like children are at a greater risk. Dental caries are a cumulative disease that can span from early childhood into adult years, therefore early preventative initiatives are vital.

A 2022 study on barriers to dental care for ASD children from a parents' perspective showed that accessing dental care was hampered by lack of knowledge by parents on numerous topics. These topics included; the importance of early dental visits and home care, parents' beliefs on the child's acceptance to dental treatment, lack of information on specialised dentists and high cost of dental treatment especially for desensitising appointments (Junnarkar *et al.*, 2023). For this reason, Keep Smiling – Working Together will focus on highlighting the importance of early dental care and give parents some control in accessing care for their child in a person-centred approach. Advice given in our infographic addresses difficulties parents and their children face with home care and given practical tips relevant to their needs rather than generic information which can be unhelpful. By helping to prepare children with ASD as to what to expect and the sequences of events during dental appointments, this home care will help begin the desensitising process in an environment they feel safe.

Through our website, accessed through the QR code, we will have a directory for services and resources for families to use. These will include links to specialist dentist in Ireland, resources such as brushmyteeth.ie and other helpful services.

A goal of Smile agus Slainte National Oral Health Policy 2019, "is to reduce oral health inequalities across the population by enabling vulnerable groups to access oral healthcare and improve their own oral health". By addressing some of the barriers to good oral health, Keep Smiling - Working Together, hopes to do the same for children with ASD and their parents.

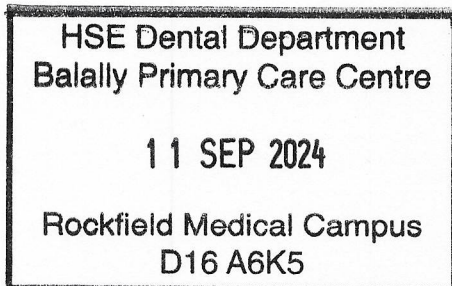
### **Conclusion**

Through our infographic campaign we hope to educate parents on how to prepare their child with ASD for dental visit and encourage good oral health practices. By taking a collaborative approach we can help create a positive dental experience and improve the oral health of this cohort.

### **Acknowledgement**

Glue VFX Design

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## References

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