autism
wellbeing

Autism Wellbeing's Top Twelve Toothbrushing Tips:

1. **Try changing where you brush teeth, a different environment may feel safer and support regulation.** (Remember: Shiny surfaces, bright lights, standing up, being upstairs, smelly toilets – may all be contributing to what is already an overwhelming sensory processing experience)
2. **Consider using music.** Familiar sounds and music may offer comfort and increased regulation. Music may also reduce the focus on the sound of the brushing. Songs can help indicate the length of time brushing will take.
3. **Brushing teeth in the bath**. A child is often distracted by toys at bath time and feeling regulated by being in the water.
4. **If you are supporting someone.** Make sure you are regulated and calm as the person may take their cue from you.
5. **Coregulation.** Help the person who finds brushing their teeth distressing, to regulate themselves too. When we are frightened we are likely to turn to fight, flight or freeze responses to protect ourselves.
6. **Explore oral sensations at other times**. For example, crunchy snacks, chewy foods, different temperatures, crunching ice.
7. **Increase oral proprioceptive input**. Sucking smoothies through straws or using 'crazy' straws that take more effort to drink through. Introduce vibration through toys at non tooth brushing time – this may lay the ground for introducing an electric toothbrush later on.
8. **Prime your mouth for tooth brushing sensations.** Some people may like deep pressure massage on their chin, neck and jaw prior to brushing, or to eat crunchy food first. Some may like having their chin held during brushing itself to receive grounding input. The use of an electric toothbrush can support with brushing and regulation.
9. **Try social stories, role plays and visual supports may be useful.** But only if they don't add to the person's distress. Understanding why toothbrushing is important, watching parents and carers calmly brush their own teeth, or brushing a puppet or toys teeth may all be helpful.
10. **A sense of control is important for many.** The more control the person has of what is happening to them, the more able they are to regulate themselves and prepare themselves for sensations that cause distress.
11. **Routine may be important.** Think about where you incorporate toothbrushing into the day. If it is immediately before bedtime and bedtime is already stressful then try doing it before a favored activity.
12. **Do it together.** Seeing someone who is regulated brushing their teeth and doing it alongside you offers comfort and feelings of safety.