



Q. I am a 5th grade teacher and a few of my students have poor hygiene and body odor. Some of them get teased by other students which I put a stop to in my class! How can I address this problem without hurting the children's feelings and offending parents?

A. This is a hot topic but one that needs to be addressed! You can approach the subject in your classroom as a health lesson and send home a notice to parents that you will be covering this topic in class. Explain to them that this is not a sex education class just a health topic on how to take care of your body! Some parents are so busy and don't notice that their children are of age to start using body products. A flyer home may grab their attention to the matter. As puberty starts parents must teach children good hygiene. Often around 9 and 10 years old parents begin to let children bath themselves and sometimes they don't do a good job! Children who are not clean can suffer from:

1. Teasing
2. Alienation from peers
3. Have low self esteem
4. Afraid to interact with others
5. May catch diseases or spread diseases
6. May develop skin conditions
7. Have bad body odour
8. Can develop urinary tract infections
9. Hair can become matted
10. Painful cavities can form
11. Bad breath
12. Scabies
13. Pink eye

Here are some tips for parents from the Kaboose.com website:

Make baths fun

Babies usually love bath time but pre-pubescent boys are often a different story. How often your child needs a soak depends on the time of year, the type of skin he has and how dirty he gets. According to Dr. Smitherman, assistant professor of pediatrics at Wayne State University, infants need their faces, necks and bottoms washed throughout the day. Children with normal skin who are active can bathe daily, and those with dry skin might choose to bath every one-to-two days. In the summer, especially if children are playing outside, and once puberty starts, baths should be daily. Add toys and make up games, too!

Shower power

Maybe a bath sounds babyish to your older child. Instead, you can install a kid-safe showerhead, for ages 3 and up, which is adjustable to your child's height, has a gentler spray and fun animal shaped showerheads—these are available at many department stores. The idea is that feeling independent and grown-up will encourage him to lather up more often.

Wash hands

Hand washing is the best way to prevent the spread of illnesses, says Dr. Smitherman. “Germs from coughing, rubbing the eyes, nose and mouth can be spread to other people by the hands. Hand washing helps decrease the number of germs that can be spread.”

Make it count

Using the proper technique is important when washing hands: first wet the hands thoroughly with warm water, then use enough soap to create a good lather and rub the hands vigorously for 20 seconds. Rinse, dry and turn off the faucet with the towel. Kids should wash their hands frequently: before all meals, after outdoor activities and playing with pets.

Clip away germs

Keeping nails clean and trimmed is important. Germs hide under nails. If you scratch your skin with dirty, long nails, you may develop an infection.

Clean hands on the go

While washing hands with soap and water is best, hand sanitizers are very useful when there is no access to running water, such as in the car, on the playground and in the classroom. They're safe to use for all ages; however younger children may need to be closely supervised so they don't put their hands in their mouths or rub their eyes before the sanitizer evaporates.

Care for teeth

“All children should be screened by a dentist by age one,” says Dr. Mary J. Hayes, a pediatric dentist in private practice in Chicago and spokesperson for the American Dental Association. “About 20 percent of three-year-olds have decay and that started when they were one and two.”

Brush properly

By the time your child is a pre-teen, he/she should be brushing three times a day. Kids are now eating smaller meals, more often. This means they have more food sitting on their teeth, which leads to more risk for cavities. Besides brushing in the morning and before bed, squeeze in a third brush mid-day after the afternoon snack. Anytime your child munches on sugary treats, have him brush within 20 minutes since bacteria can take their toll that quickly.

Lend a hand

Children under six don't have the fine motor skills to brush or floss properly. Young children need to be brushed by the parent or at least hand over hand. The same goes for flossing, which kids under 12 may find hard to manage.

Rinse and spit

To prevent decay, especially if your child is susceptible to cavities, have your child rinse with a fluoridated mouthwash. Just be sure he/she spits it out rather than swallow it.

Parents must also make sure that their children:

1. Have clean hair
2. Scrub good in the tub
3. Wear clean clothes
4. Know how to blow their noses
5. Have and use deodorant
6. Have and use lotion
7. Keep faces clean
8. Have good eating habits and avoid sweet foods

9. Consult pediatrician if the child has a bad odour

What Can You Do As A Teacher?

1. Create a lesson that is a thematic unit that will span a few weeks
2. Have the kids tell what staying clean means and how to do it
3. Ask parents to send in toothpaste and toothbrushes so students can brush after lunch
4. Buy deodorant, lotion, hair products for your students who you know need it most and who may not be able to afford it in this economy—but give it to them alone so they don't feel singled out or embarrassed
5. Have the children write a fictional story about a boy or girl who has poor hygiene and how he/she can fix it
6. Solicit parents help
7. Take your class on a field trip to visit doctor and dentist offices
8. Ask special area teachers to help you during your thematic unit, for example, the kids can draw pictures about hygiene in art class, and talk about washing off after gym
9. Make the lesson a fun one

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