People with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) often have challenges to ordinary activities of daily living, such as brushing teeth. Some may be on medications that cause xerostomia (dry mouth), which is a common side effect.

Keep mouths moist and clean to prevent disease. A toothbrush is the best way to clean the mouth, even if there are few teeth or no teeth.

Take your time! Make tooth brushing a relaxed, fun time.

Some ideas to make oral care fun:
- Let the individual select and purchase his/her own toothbrush. They may want something colorful;
- Try an electric toothbrush;
- Try different toothpastes, even kids’ sweet toothpaste.

Watch out for dry mouth. Many medications cause drying.
Help for Common Tooth Brushing Problems

**GRABBING/HITTING**
- Maybe the individual is scared or startled.
- Slow down. Use a lot of praise.
- Let the individual hold a toothbrush, a cup, or another preferred item.

**WON’T OPEN MOUTH**
- Stay positive and calm.
- Give them their toothbrush and encourage them to brush independently.
  - Put some toothpaste on the lips so they can smell and taste it.

**BITING THE TOOTHBRUSH**
- Stop! Don’t pull on the brush. (Pulling will activate a bite reflex and the individual will bite harder.)
  - Distract the individual so they will relax their jaw.
  - Return to a fun, calm atmosphere before trying again.