Beating Brushing Battles

Adults need to be involved...
in fact, need to help until the child is about 8 years old.

- Build tooth brushing into the daily routine - after breakfast and at bedtime.
- Plan something for after the brushing to keep the child moving.
  - “When you brush then we will.............”
- Singing a toothbrush song - especially with your mouth full - is a great distraction.
- Make it fun!
  - Go on a food hunt: “Didn’t you eat spaghetti? I can’t find it!”
  - Hunt for silly things: “There is an elephant in there!”
  - Spit it out: “Listen to the elephant go down the drain!” (make noises!)
- Plan ahead for distractions! Put something in the sink to spit on or rinse down:
  - with watercolor marker draw a picture, write child’s name, numbers, letters...
  - draw dots of fairy dust from the tooth fairy!
- Teach a stuffed animal/baby how to brush.
- Give the child a sense of control: Offer a choice:
  - “Should I start on the top or bottom teeth?” “Do you want the red or pink brush today?”
- Call on an expert:
  - Read books about tooth care, dentists, etc.
  - Visit the dentist and let the authority speak!
- Do NOT use the dentist as a threat!
  - “Find” notes from the tooth fairy praising the child’s tooth care.
- Avoid “punishments” and keep your sense of humor!
- Try togetherness:
  - Let child go first, then you finish up.
  - Offer a choice as to who goes first.
  - Let child watch you brush your teeth—kids learn by imitating.
  - Let child brush your teeth while you brush his (this takes some coordination!)
- Talk, talk, talk while you brush.
  - Describe/remember his/her day from beginning to end.
  - Kids love to be the center of attention.
- If you are into a battle, do a quick and firm job this time...then plan ahead for a different method next time.
- Having a trick up your sleeve (or in your bathroom) usually takes less time than a fight!

Adapted from Cavity Free Kids, Washington Dental Service Foundation