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Understanding the impact of motivational interviewing-supported behaviour change on caries prevention in high-risk children

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Understanding why and how behavioural interventions work is crucial to identifying mechanisms of change to explain treatment efficacy. This study analyses change processes from a successful randomised controlled trial (Dental RECUR) including: parental attitudes and beliefs surrounding toothbrushing and dietary behaviour; and, behaviour change techniques identified to support the achievement of goals in the prevention of future caries.

Participants were parents of 5-7-year-old children due to have teeth extracted because of dental caries recruited at twelve centres across the U.K. Participants took part in a 30-minute therapeutic conversation guided by a dental nurse. Twenty-two interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed to explore parental approach to changing familial toothbrushing and dietary behaviour.

Four themes were identified relating to toothbrushing (decisions dictated by path of least resistance, parental views of responsibility, lack of understanding of existing knowledge, extraction experience eliciting motivation for change) and dietary behaviour (parents' perception and knowledge of effects of sugar on oral health, challenges of dietary control, changing eating behaviours and parental control, parents view of oral health and extraction process).

Analysing processes of behaviour change within RCTs can help identify what leads to successful outcomes and guide future interventions. The findings suggest that knowledge alone is insufficient to change behaviour, and that temptation, self-efficacy, and decisional balance are important constructs in predicting successful behaviour change.