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PARENTING WITH CONFIDENCE



toddlers and dummies

Dummies are transitional objects. Toddlers may be comforted by their dummy, however dummies may cause problems including speech development. Sometimes it's a good idea to help your toddler to give up their dummy.

Various strategies can help your toddler painlessly wean themselves off their dummy. Some babies are soothed and comforted by sucking and like to use a dummy. They will especially want their dummy when they are tired or distressed because it makes them feel calmer. To avoid problems later, it may be a good idea if parents restrict when and how often a dummy is used. For example, if you choose to use a dummy, only let your child have it at sleep time.

Dummies may cause problems

Babies who use dummies may develop disrupted sleeping patterns. This is because they come to rely on the dummy to sleep and may become distressed and wake up if they lose the dummy during the night. Speech development may also be affected because it's hard to learn to talk with a dummy in your mouth. Various strategies can help your toddler wean themselves off their dummy. You could start by restricting use of the dummy to bedtime.

Talk to your child

If you feel your child is ready to give up their dummy for good, talk to them about it. Suggestions include:

- Pick a time when your child is relaxed and happy.
- Don't nag, criticise or ridicule your child. You will only cause distress.
- Tell them you think they are grown up enough to do without a dummy.
- Identify why they want it or are they bored and tired?
- As the dummy is restricted, another favoured comfort item (such as a teddy or special blanket) might be chosen to take to bed instead of the dummy.

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Decide on your strategy

There are basically two ways to break the dummy habit – quickly or slowly. When you and your child decide it's time to stop using the dummy, the quick option means you simply throw the dummy away. Having a little ceremony involving the child might be helpful. Be firm and gently remind them of their resolve not to use their dummy anymore. Try to distract them with other activities and help them find other ways to soothe and relax themselves.

If you decide to get rid of the dummy slowly, this means reserving its use for designated times only, such as going to bed. Your child could perhaps tuck the dummy under their pillow every morning. Once again, be firm but understanding. Over time, your child's attachment to their dummy will lessen, which means that throwing the dummy away will come easier. Avoid making promises such "We'll give it to Santa or the Easter Bunny".

Use a reward system

Toddlers respond well to praise and encouragement. Think about using a reward system while your child is giving up their dummy. Compliment them often on their new behaviour and tell them how proud you are.

Resisting the change Comfort objects can gradually become a habit as children approach school age, but children can also look for them when they are stressed and use them to help deal with anxiety. Give your child more one on one time and attention and remember that changes in habits can take time.

Your toddler might need their dummy to feel safe and secure, particularly when they aren't with you. Ideally the child should voluntarily give up their dummy when they feel ready, rather than have the action forced upon them by others.

If your child is adamant about keeping their dummy, or if they seem despondent without it, you need to find out what is bothering them.

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