

Helping your child at home

Dummies and Soothers



Dummies and soothers are often seen as an essential item for all new-borns – they help settle and calm babies and young children. However, babies and children do not **need** dummies – in fact there is a great deal of evidence that dummies can have a negative impact on the health and development of a child.

Parents often find that children get attached to their dummies very quickly. They become dependent on the dummy as a comforter and this causes trauma when it is taken away.

There is a large body of academic research (not to mention our own years of professional experience) which evidence some significant potential impacts of using a dummy. We have listed these at the end of the leaflet. This is not to make you feel bad, but it may help you appreciate why it's worth taking action now! And if you are expecting a baby, you may want to wait **before** buying one; your baby may be fine without!

Some of the known disadvantages of extended use of dummies:

Disadvantages	Impact
Restricted mouth movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Children learn to speak through developing oral muscles. They do this in many ways, including making faces, babbling and making

	<p>sounds. These are very important for the developing child and the pre-talker</p>
<p>Children who use dummies are usually slower to start talking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any delay in being able to express themselves can cause huge frustration, which often results in tantrums. • Because their tongue and mouth movements are less developed, children find it harder to form first sounds. This can take years to correct and often requires professional speech and language therapy
<p>Babies and children who use dummies often have their teeth pushed out of position</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their upper and lower teeth will not meet properly and will require correction by a professional
<p>Tooth decay is more likely</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This causes the child pain and distress.
<p>They will breathe through their mouths rather than their nose</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This can result in issues such as dribbling
<p>Bonding and communication issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even pre-takers make sounds that adult carers respond to. This helps to build close relationships and is often referred to as 'parentese'. • Children learn 'rules' of communication as adults say a phrase and wait for a response before speaking again. If the child is using a dummy, this process is more difficult.
<p>Friendship issues as they get older</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children who are slow to speak or who speak unclearly may struggle to make friends – If other children cannot understand them, they may be excluded from play
<p>Lower self-confidence as they get older</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If children have speech issues, they may be more reluctant to speak, particularly in class • Older children can find attending speech therapy to correct issues embarrassing

Please think carefully about whether you want your child to have a dummy. By providing your baby with a dummy or soother to 'comfort' or quiet them, you may be risking greater issues later in life.

My child already uses a dummy. How do I restrict the use of it?

- Try restricting its use to bedtime and keep it out of sight during the day. We do this at nursery and the children are happy to voluntarily give staff their dummy when they get up after a rest.
- Ask your child to give you the dummy and make sure that they do! Respond with enthusiasm, saying "Thank you!" and then put it out of sight straight away. You might like to play a game at this point that they could not do if they were using the dummy, such as 'Let's make funny sounds' or sing a favourite song.
- Be firm! Explain that you will have fun together without the dummy and it will be kept safe for bedtime. The younger the child, the easier this will be but persevere and be firm!
- Make sure that all carers and family members do the same. It will make the transition longer if they associate the dummy with a particular person e.g. Granny.
- Explain – "I know that you don't use the dummy at nurse and we will do the same thing at home. How do I wean my child off the dummy?"

Speech and Language Therapists and Health Visitors advise that, if a child has been introduced to a dummy as a baby, they should be weaned off it **before the age of 10 – 12 months**. There are books and publications that advise on different strategies, some of which include fantasy and make-believe e.g. Father Christmas, Tooth Fairy or a Noo-Noo Tree. We do not encourage the use of these strategies because children need to see that we are telling the truth. That will build trust, especially important when something that they rely on is being withdrawn.

The Montessori approach is to come to an agreement with your child about when (not if) you are going to throw the dummy away. This will be different for each child and depends on their age.

- If they are under 1 year old – Take a time when they fall asleep without the dummy and, when they wake, explain "You went to sleep without your dummy. You know, I don't think you need this anymore!" If you repeat this regularly, they will begin to come to the same conclusion.
- If they are over 1 year old – Have fun singing and playing games that they couldn't do if they were using the dummy. When it is going well celebrate what is going

on, “That’s funny, we couldn’t do this if you had your dummy!” Over time, they will tend to agree.

- At bedtime, choose a story which has a repeated refrain. For example, ‘Dear Zoo’, *I sent him back!*

Please ask us for other suggestions. We are very happy to help!