



What's the best way to get a child to stop sucking his/her thumb or using a pacifier?

As a first step in dealing with your child's sucking habits, ignore them! Most often, they will stop on their own. Harsh words, teasing, or punishment may upset your child and is not an effective way to get rid of habits. Instead, try the following:

- Praise and reward your child when he does not suck his thumb or use the pacifier. Star charts, daily rewards, and gentle reminders, especially during the day, are also very helpful.
- If your child uses sucking to relieve boredom, keep his hands busy or distract him with things he finds fun.
- If you see changes in the roof of your child's mouth (palate) or in the way the teeth are lining up, talk to your pediatrician or pediatric dentist. There are devices that can be put in the mouth that make it uncomfortable to suck on a finger or thumb.

No matter what method you try, be sure to explain them to your child. If they make your child afraid or tense, stop them at once.

The good news is that most children stop their sucking habits before they get very far in school. This is because of peer pressure. While your child might still use sucking as a way of going to sleep or calming down when upset, this is usually done in private and is not harmful. Putting too much pressure on your child to stop may cause more harm than good. Be assured your child will eventually stop the habit on his own.

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