



Dummies and Speech Development

Many parents use a dummy to help soothe their child. This is understandable as most babies have a strong sucking reflex and often a dummy can help settle a child. Dummies can be an invaluable support to parents and babies in the early months of development.



However, did you know that prolonged use of a dummy can cause potential risks to the development of speech and language?

Overuse of a dummy can have an impact on:

- The development of babbling, an important early stage in learning to talk
- Development of the full range of tongue movements, important for sounds like t, d and l
- Tongue position and pattern of tongue movements making speech sounds unclear, important for sounds like s and sh
- Gaps between the upper and lower front teeth which may lead to a lisp making sounds like s, and z difficult
- Reduced desire to communicate – with a dummy in the mouth, some young children may become less likely to seek out talking activities
- Increased dribbling – some children may find it difficult to get good lip closure because of the dummy and may have more saliva dribbles and slushy sounding speech

How can you help your child?

Getting rid of a dummy is not easy! However, it can be more difficult to wean children off as they get older. This can result in stress for both of you.

Choose the right time for your child to give up their dummy – not when you are under pressure.

Make a clean break – throw away the dummy over a weekend, or at a time when you have support.

Most babies and toddlers will fret for no more than two or three days.

Once you have decided to give the dummy up, don't be tempted to give it back, and make sure there are none left around.





Other ideas that parents have tried:

- Lots of positive praise for your child when they do not use their dummy
- Give the dummy to Santa / Tooth Fairy
- Get your child to throw the dummy in the bin
- Swap the dummy for a gift / cuddly toy / new toothbrush

Remember

- Never dip your baby's dummy into anything sweet. This can cause tooth decay
- Don't allow your child to talk with a dummy in their mouth, it stops tongue and lip movement
- Whilst your child is using a dummy, use it as little as possible and try other means of comforting such as cuddling or reading to your child at bed time