

# Weaning Your Child Off of Pacifiers

It's your child's first love, and the breakup can be tough. Survive the pacifier weaning stage with these tried-and-true tactics.

"Young infants have no other mechanism to control their distress," explains Dowell. "They can't get a drink; they can't ask for a blanket; they can't use their hands to control things. Sucking provides a way for them to calm themselves." Marolyn Morford, PhD, a developmental psychologist in State College, Pennsylvania, recommends discontinuing the pacifier by a year. "At that age, a child's developmental needs do not include sucking," she says.

Recent studies have linked pacifiers with a three times higher risk for ear infections, so if these are a recurring problem for your child, it may be worth eliminating the pacifier to see if it makes a difference. Pacifiers can cause an overbite, open bite, or crossbite—problems that affect chewing, speech, and appearance, and often require orthodontics to correct.

## How to Stop: The Three-Day Plan

Your child can be binky-free in just three days, says Mark L. Brenner, author of *Pacifiers, Blankets, Bottles & Thumbs: What Every Parent Should Know About Stopping and Starting* (Fireside). Here's how to do it.

**Day 1:** In the morning and at bedtime, tell your child that you can see she wants to do lots of things that make her older. Tell her that's a good idea, and that in three days it will be time for her to say goodbye to her pacifiers. Tell her you know she can do it and that you'll work together on it. Keep the talk to 30 seconds and don't sound as if you're asking permission. If your child responds, reflect back her feelings—"I know you don't want to"—then move on. Don't worry that your child will become anxious if given advance warning. "That's a myth," says Brenner. "Like adults, children like to prepare themselves physically, psychologically, and emotionally for change."

**Day 2:** Repeat the same 30-second talk twice daily, only replace "in three days" with "tomorrow." Don't try to sell her on the idea. Keep your tone and manner matter-of-fact.

**Day 3:** Remind your child that it's day three and time to gather up his pacifiers. Act as if you're going on a scavenger hunt and ask your child if he'd like to help. Even if he refuses and protests, proceed to collect his pacifiers, place them in a plastic bag, and put them on the front step for "pick-up by the recycling truck." Explain that the pacifiers will be made into new tires or toys. "Children recognize that recycling is purposeful and intelligent, and will be far less upset than if you throw their treasured pacifiers in the trash," says Brenner. Which is not to say your toddler

# Weaning Your Child Off of Pacifiers

won't have a meltdown. Be empathetic, but firm, Brenner says, adding that most children get over losing their pacifiers within 48 hours.

## The Gradual Approach

Start by removing the pacifier in "zero-distress" situations, like when your child is home, happy, and playing. Once she's used to not having her pacifier at home, eliminate its outdoor use. You don't need to offer an explanation. "We sometimes over-talk to our kids," Dr. Dowell says. "All you need to say is: The pacifier doesn't leave the house."

From here, it's usually a painless leap to: "The pacifier stays in the crib." Convincing your child to make the final break, however, may be more challenging. Some parents use the "Binky Fairy" or Santa to help smooth the transition. "Near the holidays, you might tell your child that Santa collects all the pacifiers for new babies and brings toys for all the big girls and boys," suggests Ivy Faske, MD, a pediatrician in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. Or you could tell your child that the dentist or doctor collects pacifiers for new babies, and that if she donates hers, she'll get a special toy.

Don't be surprised, however, if the child who traded her pacifiers for a Dora doll suddenly wails for her binky. "You have to be willing to put up with a few really bad nights," says Faske. "But most kids soon find other sources of comfort."

## Weathering the Storm

Whatever method you choose, brace yourself for one to five nights of crying, and whatever you do, don't give in. "If you give a child back the pacifier after he's cried, screamed, and kicked for 45 minutes, you'll only solidify that such carrying on will get him the pacifier—and everything else he wants," says Glinder. If you're tempted to cave, remember: Children (and parents) have endured this rite of passage for millennia. "We all get rid of our pacifiers eventually," he says.