

## Are you a Sucker for Good Speech and Language?



Whether to allow your child to suck on a dummy or their own thumb has always been a controversial topic. There are certainly many arguments for and against the use of sucking as a comforting tool. However all parties seem to agree on the fact that sucking on dummies or thumbs for long periods throughout the day and beyond 1 - 2 years of age is detrimental.

### How can sucking a dummy or a thumb affect Speech and Language Development?

1. Studies have suggested that dummies and thumb sucking can delay speech sound development. They can promote a forward tongue placement whereby the tongue protrudes between the teeth during speech sound production.
2. Studies have shown that children using dummies or thumb sucking have less opportunities to babble and practice different shapes with their mouths. This can lead to delays in oral motor skills for speech.
3. Prolonged sucking on any object beyond 3 years is thought to push the teeth out of alignment and this in turn leads to speech sound disorders.
4. There is a proven link between the long term use of dummies and increased incidence of middle ear infections. Repeated middle ear infections is one of the most common causes of speech sound delays.
5. The use of a dummy or thumb sucking reduces the opportunity for a child to talk and interact in their environment giving them less time to develop and perfect their language skills (i.e. their vocabulary and use of different sentence structures).
6. Recent research suggests that children talk more often and more clearly if they do not use a dummy.

### Hints and Tips

- Try to limit the time during which a dummy or thumb is being used. Use it just for settling purposes.
- Wait for your baby to need the dummy rather than automatically giving it to them.
- Reward the child and give them lots of praise when they are not using the dummy or sucking their thumb.
- If your child really needs to suck on something to settle, dummies are thought to be better than thumb sucking because at least you can take the dummy away gradually.

