



Parents are usually in one of two camps when it comes to the use of pacifiers for babies; but if you did let your baby have one, when is the right time to ditch the dummy?

In the early days, a dummy can satisfy a baby's seemingly constant desire to suck. It can also offer much needed peace for parents of babies who are difficult to settle or have reflux. Let's be realistic, if a dummy gives you and your baby much-needed peace and quiet in those first few months, who's going to suggest otherwise. The decision to use one should be your own personal choice, but eventually, all good things must come to an end and, although some babies and toddlers simply outgrow their pacifiers, more often than not they need a little help from you in letting go.

when should I stop using the dummy?

Between 6-months to 1-year is preferable. Children over 1-year can become very dependent on the dummy and, as with most habits, the longer you leave it the harder it is to resolve.

will the dummy affect my child's speech?

Prolonged use of a dummy, even during the first year, impacts on your baby's early speech development. Between 6- to 12-months, your baby will become 'orally fixated', which is a normal developmental stage where your baby constantly explores objects via his mouth. This stage is important as it helps babies learn to use their tongue and lip muscles effectively, thus preparing them for babbling and early

speech sounds. If a baby constantly has a dummy in his mouth, the desire to mouth toys, fingers and other objects is greatly reduced, focusing all their attention on sucking. It can also affect their ability to control their saliva due to their poor mouth posture, causing them to drool more which often results in soreness and chapping around the mouth.

In older children, prolonged dummy usage can have an even bigger impact on their speech. In fact, some Speech Therapists claim they can actually tell which children do or don't use a dummy. This is because through prolonged sucking, the back muscles of the mouth become over-stimulated and the lips, mouth and tongue muscles become restricted. There is also the danger that your child simply won't try to babble or talk as much because he is soothing himself with the pacifier, therefore missing out on vital speech practice. Also, if a child constantly has a dummy in his mouth, he learn to talk round it by biting on the teat itself to keep it in. For example, a child would say 'Kiger' instead of 'Tiger'. Try it yourself by talking with a spoon in your mouth and see what happens. You will soon realise how important the tongue and lips are in forming words correctly.

how to let go?

It is important that when you make the decision to ditch the dummy it should be the right time in your child's life. Doing it during stressful times such as the arrival of a new sibling or moving house isn't recommended. Once you make the decision to do it, you must stick to it, as consistency and perseverance will be your tools to success.

for under-1s

Try weaning your baby off the dummy gradually over the course of a few weeks. Remove the dummy as soon as your baby

the dummy tree



is asleep so that they get used to waking up without it. If your baby wakes in the night, don't rush in to put the dummy in straight away, try offering comfort and reassurance first. You may like to introduce a comfort toy for your baby to attach to instead. Again, if your baby gets cranky during the day, don't reach for the dummy straight away; try distracting him with a new toy or gentle music so that the dummy doesn't become an expectation. After a few weeks, your baby will become less used to having it and it will be less traumatic to give it up for good.

for toddlers

Once you've decided it's time for your child to give up the dummy, it is really important that you explain beforehand what you are going to do and that your child is actively involved in this event. Some parents have come up with some masterful ways of getting their child to ditch their dummy (sometimes it's even happened accidentally, such as the child dropping it into the toilet and being totally fine about not having it back!), so ask around your friends to see what worked for them. Here are a few suggestions in the meantime.

the dummy fairy

Get your child to collect up all their dummies (make sure there are none stuck between the sofa cushions, behind the TV or in the toy box!). Place them all in a gift bag (your child could even help decorate it) and hang them on the front door of your house one evening. Explain to your child that they are now too old for a dummy and that the dummy fairy is going to come and take them away for some new babies to use or that they will be planted in the sky



to become stars, much like the tooth fairy analogy. Make sure that when your child wakes the next morning, there is a special new bedtime toy waiting on the door step - simply magical!

the balloon trick

Buy a large helium balloon and attach your child's dummy to it; explain to your child that now she is a big girl, the 'dummy fairy' in the sky needs to have it. Take your child to a park or beach, so your child can watch it slowly disappear into the sky. It is really important that your child releases it herself, so she knows it was her decision in the end.

the dummy tree (pictured above)

In Copenhagen's main city park, a large oak tree stands bearing hundreds of dummies dangling from its branches. For decades, Danish parents have been taking their children to visit this 'dummy tree' where children can attach their dummies to a branch and leave a personal message of thanks and farewell. The sight itself for any young child is magical and inspiring, thus empowering them to let go.

Once you decide to ditch the dummy, it is vital that there is no going back. Your child might be a bit more clingy and tearful during the first few days, as the dummy would have been his main source of comfort, so spend more time offering comfort and praise and let him know how proud you are for letting go.

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