

# **TIPS ON OVERCOMING THUMBSUCKING**

## **Help your child give up thumbsucking during the day**

First get your child's commitment if he or she expresses the desire to stop the thumb habit. Then show what thumbsucking is doing to her teeth and body. Show her the gap between the upper and lower teeth and the wrinkled, rough skin (callus) on the thumb. Discuss the aspect of placing the thumb in the mouth when there are germs or dirt on it. During the first few days, keep your child distracted from the sucking behavior by occupying her hands with drawing, craft projects, puzzles and games. If the hands are busy they won't be going in the mouth. Character Band-Aids work well for daytime as a special helper to let her know when the thumb is trying to sneak into the mouth. Limit television watching for the first couple of weeks and avoid other situations that stimulate the sucking habit. Ask your child if it will be all right if you remind them when they forget. Do this gently with comments such as "Guess what?" and put an arm around your child.

## **At the same time, help your child give up thumbsucking during sleep**

Most children depend heavily on the sucking activity to relax and fall asleep at naptime and bedtime and it takes the longest to eliminate. To address the sleeptime sucking at the same time you are working on the daytime habit minimizes frustration and enhances success. A long cotton tube sock, puppet sock, or gloves (decorated) are effective reminders. Help your child look upon this method as a clever and a fun idea rather than any kind of penalty. The habit belongs to the child and the child must willingly cooperate and accept responsibility if the habit is to be eliminated.

## **Incentives**

Praise your child whenever you notice the absence of thumbsucking in the usual situations. This will build self confidence. Put a star on a chart and give a reward (such as a dime, a snack, or an extra story) at the end of any day during which he or she did not suck the thumb at all.

## **What to avoid**

The following techniques are generally not helpful for younger children and may prolong the thumbsucking habit because the child looks upon them as punishment: Dental appliances, elastic wrap or splints or bitter-tasting medicines applied to the thumbnail

Thumbsucking lasting beyond age 5 can usually be prevented if you avoid pulling your child's thumb out of his or her mouth. Also, don't comment in your child's presence about your dissatisfaction with the habit. Scolding, slapping the hand, or other punishments will only make your child dig their heels in about thumbsucking. If you can wait, your child will usually give up the thumbsucking naturally. If you turn the issue into a showdown, you will lose, since the thumb belongs to your child.

## **Other resources**

Check with your local library or bookstore to see if they carry any books that maybe helpful . One recommendation we have is "David Decides about Thumbsucking". This books contains information for both you and your child.

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