

BREAKING THE HABIT OF THUMBSUCKING

STEP 1: PREPARATION

- Buy some stickers if you don't have some already.
- Take a picture of your child sleeping at night without thumbsucking. Also take a picture of them playing during the day without sucking their thumb (choose a time when they would normally be sucking their thumb). Print the pictures to use later.
- Get a stuffed animal or hand puppet for your child to use when sleeping. Wrap it.
- Get some colorful string or ribbon to use to tie on your child's thumb.

STEP 2: TEACHING & INTRODUCTION

- Keeping your tone positive and upbeat, sit your child down and talk to them about sucking their thumb and why it needs to stop. Sometimes, there can be some underlining emotional reasons for her thumb sucking so it's important to talk to them and give them the comfort they need. You may need to get to the root of this issue if you are to succeed at stopping the habit.
- Show them the picture of them sleeping without sucking their thumb. Explain to them that this picture shows them that they can sleep without their thumb...and look how big they are! Explain to them that when they were a baby they used their thumb to help them learn to go to sleep. Now that they are bigger and older, they don't need it anymore...and here is proof!
- Give them the gift-wrapped animal. Have them open it up. Tell them that this is their new friend who needs help sleeping and now that they are big enough to go to sleep without their thumb, they can help their new friend go to sleep by holding it in their arms. (*Kids love stories, so you can make up a story to go along with this concept.*) Also, if you choose to give them the animal and not the puppet, it might be helpful to have your child wear some mittens or gloves to bed at night.
- **Do this for GOALS 3 & 4.** Get the colorful string (for day-time use only). Tie it on their thumb (not too tight). Explain to them that this pretty bow is here to remind them to not suck their thumb. When they go to suck their thumb, they will see the ribbon and remember to stop. Show them the picture of them playing without sucking their thumb and point out how cute they are and how big they look!

STEP 3: REWARDS CHART

- *Note to parents: breaking this habit can take some time and patience. It is best to start out small and progress to bigger goals. They can get small rewards throughout the process and a bigger reward when their habit is completely broken (such as going to Chuck E Cheese or somewhere fun). Below is a suggested plan, however you can make any changes you need to better fit your own personal situation. ALSO, DO NOT MOVE ONTO NEXT GOAL UNTIL YOU FEEL THE CHILD IS READY. PRINT AS MANY REWARDS CHARTS AS YOU NEED.*
- Show them the rewards chart. Explain to them their goals and when they remember to not suck their thumb, they will get to put a sticker on their chart. When the chart is filled up with stickers, they can choose a toy or treat. (*You may choose to get your child a reward when each goal is reached or when the chart is filled.*) Ask your child where they would like to put their REWARDS CHART and have them hang it up. Put the pictures of them next to it as a constant reminder.

GOAL 1: Going to sleep without sucking their thumb.

Give your child a sticker if they **fall asleep** without sucking their thumb. During the night, they might suck their thumb again (that's okay, we are taking baby steps!). *You can also have them wear gloves or mittens to bed to help discourage them from sucking.* Be sure to give them their sticker first thing in the morning. The rewards chart is a priority. Also, during this goal, if you see your child with their thumb in their mouth while they are sleeping, gently remove it. Repeat as often as you can.

GOAL 2: Sleeping all night without their thumb.

Give your child a sticker if they sleep all night without sucking their thumb.

GOAL 3: Going throughout the day without sucking their thumb.

Remember the ribbon for their thumbs for this week. Give your child a sticker at night if they went the whole day without sucking their thumb. It is okay to count the times you reminded them about their sticker, when they almost sucked their thumb.

GOAL 4: No thumbsucking day or night!

Give them a sticker at night for going all day without sucking their thumb.

Give them a sticker in the morning for going all night without sucking their thumb.

STEP 4: PARENT TIPS

- Always remember to be encouraging and give lots of praise, especially when they are getting their sticker.
- NEVER get discouraged and upset with your child.
- Constantly remind your child of their sticker, especially during times where they might be more prone to sucking.
- Gently remind your child to stop sucking their thumb when you see them sucking.
- Keep your child's hands busy as much as possible.
- If they don't get a sticker, be positive. Tell them it's okay, try and do better next time and you will get a sticker!

