

Pacifiers & Sippy Cups While Learning to Speak Clearly

As children are learning first words, they require a functional oral motor mechanism to produce accurate sounds leading to sound combinations and eventually to words. Once they use words, they combine those words into sentences. As the sentences increase in length, messages become clearer and they are off to becoming competent speakers.

However, there may be obstacles along the way. Two of those obstacles might be overuse of pacifiers and sippy cups. Though both of these items provide a respectful purpose for developing young children, such as comfort and fewer liquid spills, it is best not to prolong use beyond a reasonable amount of time. We need to keep children developing in a forward motion. If they are stuck in any mode, controlled by adults weary of creating more complications in their own lives, dysfunctional situations may arise.

As children suck on pacifiers, they gain a level of security and comfort. Sucking is an important basic need for infants, sometimes into toddlerhood. However, sucking should progress into other motor movements, such as chewing and speaking. If a pacifier continues to be in a child's mouth more often than not, such as throughout the day vs. just at rest and sleep times, it may thwart ensuing developmental stages. Children learn to talk around pacifiers, garbling speech, increasing frustrations for them and listeners. Therefore, at a certain point in time (sometimes decided by a child, sometimes necessitated decision by an adult), the pacifier should not be used as a means of comfort and security any longer. For typical situations (which is most!), I recommend curtailing the use of pacifiers throughout the day past one-year old. Minimize the use to only bedtime and slowly curtail this use through the second year.

Sippy cups were an innovative invention to help minimize spills, as a step between the nipple and a cup rim. Though again, they produce a degree of motor development and comfort (mostly for adults this time!), the use of sippy cups should not be prolonged. The sooner young children can experiment with drinking from conventional cups, the better. Try to experiment in the bathtub or outside where spills don't matter.