

Using Pacifiers & Sippy Cups While Learning to Speak Clearly

Kathleen Ross, MS, SLP, ECE

As children learn first words, they require a functional oral mechanism (mouth) to produce accurate sounds and sound combinations that lead to words and sentences. The goal is clear communications in conversations. However, there may be obstacles that get in the way for clear productions.

Two of those obstacles might be overuse of pacifiers and sippy cups. These items provide logical purpose for developing young children: comfort, security, and fewer liquid spills. But it is best not to prolong use beyond a reasonable amount of time. Children's mouths need to naturally develop forward for speech production without additional devices in the way. Pacifiers and sippy cups tend to be controlled by adults, using them to lessen complications in their own lives, e.g., noisy children in public places or drink spills. Makes total sense, but it may turn into dysfunctional use.



So, if a pacifier remains in a child's mouth beyond rest and sleep times, it may interfere with developing oral motor skills. Children learn to talk around pacifiers, garbling speech, and increasing frustrations for listeners and ultimately themselves. Therefore, at a certain point in time (sometimes decided by the child, sometimes a necessitated decision by an adult), the pacifier should not be used as a means of comfort and security any longer. For typical situations, limit the use of pacifiers throughout the day after one-year of age. Then decrease the use to only bedtime and eventually no 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 comfort, perhaps mostly for adults who tire of cleaning up messes, the use of sippy cups should not be prolonged. The sooner young children can try drinking from conventional cups, the better. Experiment in the bathtub or outdoors where spills don't matter.

*An additional benefit of these changes is
that children do things they see adults doing.*

