

Should I be concerned about my child sucking their fingers or using a pacifier?

Most young children become accustomed to sucking their thumb, fingers, or a pacifier as a way to comfort themselves. Although this type of behavior begins to decrease around six to nine months of age, some children will continue to comfort themselves in this fashion until their third birthday. Parents should not be worried if their children continue to suck their fingers or use a pacifier beyond this age unless it begins to affect their communication, social skills, or oral development.

In the event that it begins to interfere with their growth, parents are encouraged to wean their children from this behavior slowly rather than “cold turkey”. It’s recommended that parents attempt to provide children with alternative ways to comfort themselves such as holding someone’s hand or receiving a hug. Sometimes supplying an alternative to sucking such as singing a song or having a healthy snack is helpful. Parents should provide lots of praise as their child makes progress in this area and should avoid putting their child down or referring to the use of their fingers or pacifier as “babyish”. Although you may want this habit to go away overnight, it most likely won’t and parents are encouraged to remain patient. Remember, the more anxious you appear about the behavior, the more nervous your child will become, and the more likely they will be to revert to this old habit.