

# Why do children suck their thumbs?

Some common reasons are-

- Sever emotional upsets
- stress-related problems
- A way of going to sleep
- A way of calming themselves when they get upset.

This is usually done in private and causes no harm either emotionally or physically. Putting too much pressure on your child to stop this type of behavior may cause more harm than good. Even these children stop the habit on their own.



**“Don’t worry!  
The need to suck is present in all infants.  
Some infants suck their thumbs even before they are born, and some will do it right after being born.”**

## Let Us Introduce Ourselves!

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**Thumb Sucking-  
All you want to  
know**

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## When is thumb sucking a problem?

The time it might cause you concern is if-

- It goes on beyond 6 to 8 years of age
- It's causing social problems- these children are often teased, ostracized or bullied.
- It's causing dental problems- its affecting child's bite, the alignment of their teeth, or the roof of their mouth develops.
- It's causing medical problems- skin on the thumb may shrivel, crack or chap. It can prevent nail from growing properly or even cause infections under and around the nail bed.

## How to help your child? - THE BIG QUESTION!

As children grow and develop, their need to suck usually goes away, most often by the time they are 6 to 8 years old.

As a first step merely **ignore** them! Most often, they will disappear with time.

**Peer pressure** can have positive effects- with increases in peer pressure, they are more able to control their behaviour.

### Do not be harsh.

Teasing/punishment is not an effective way to get rid of habits.

**Kill boredom-** Older children (more than 3 years of age) may use sucking to relieve boredom. Try getting your child's attention with an activity that she finds fun.

**Positive reinforcement-** Rewarding good behaviour is the best way to produce a change. Praise and reward your child when she does not suck her thumb or use the pacifier.

**Distract your child with activities that require two hands.** It's hard for a child to suck their thumb if it's in use. Keep your child busy with art supplies, outdoor play, blocks, puzzles, or anything that requires them to use two hands.

### Cover the thumb.

A thumb that is covered will not feel or taste the same as a bare thumb. and this is often enough to stop many children's thumbsucking. Try a band aid, a finger cot, a small finger puppet, or a thumb guard. If thumbsucking occurs mainly at night, try putting a mitten or a sock over the hand.



## engaging your child in the process...

No matter what method you choose, it will not work if your child does not want to stop thumb sucking. You will meet with much greater success if you are working with a willing participant. Talk to your child about why they need to stop sucking their thumb. Explain your plan and make sure they know what to expect. Ask them what might help them stop; their answer might surprise you!!!!

## When to approach your clinical psychologist for child guidance?

These children often get teased by friends, brothers, sisters, and relatives. Sometimes these comments are enough to stop child. If not, talk to your clinical psychologist.