

**Disclaimer: Activities with children must always be risk assessed, including for allergies or choking. Children must always have adequate supervision. Resources and materials must always be appropriate for children's age and stage of development.**

## Supporting parents with managing dummy use

**We know that a dummy can be a source of comfort for a child who is settling and/or upset and that it may often form part of a child's sleep routine.**

However, overuse of dummies may affect a child's language development as it can restrict the mouth movements needed for speech. As babies get older, they need to learn to move their mouths in different ways, to smile, to blow bubbles, to make sounds, to chew food and to talk. As babies move their mouths and experiment with babbling sounds, they are learning to make the quick mouth movements needed for speech.



The more practice they get, the better their awareness of their mouths and the better their speech will be.

Dummies in settings should only be offered for comfort if a child is really upset (for example, if they are new to the setting or going through a transition) and/or as part of their sleep routine, although parents may use the dummy differently.

As part of your settling policy on dummy use, strategies for supporting parents to manage this should be provided. These top tips will help you to do this effectively:

- Have clear setting guidelines on dummy use so there is a consistent message given to parents by all staff. For example:
  - Offer other methods of comfort such as a toy, teddy or blanket
  - Distract the child with other activities and ensure they are settled before leaving them to play
  - Make each child aware of a designated place where their dummy is stored
  - Explain to the child they can have their dummy when they go home or at sleep time.
- Discuss the use of dummies with parents as part of a baby's individual care plan. Ensure parents are clear that the dummy must never be attached to a neck cord, as this can be a strangulation risk. Also, it should never be dipped in juice or sweet foods due to increased risk of tooth decay
- The NHS recommends dummies are not used once a child is 6-12 months old, so get your parents on board as soon as possible to reduce or remove dummy use before both the child and the parents become over-reliant on them

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- Reinforce the importance of removing the dummy when the child is babbling or talking. The muscles around the mouth, tongue, lips and jaw are usually fully developed by the time a child is three years old, so they need plenty of opportunity to use these muscles without trying to hold a dummy in place
- Provide a range of books about dummies for parents and children to borrow to help to prepare them. Examples include 'The last noo-noo' by Jill Murphy (Walker Books) and 'I want my dummy!' (Little Princess series) by Tony Ross (Andersen Press)
- Work with parents to agree a date when the dummy will be removed from use. Parents may choose a celebration day, such as a birthday, where the dummy is given in exchange for a gift or is given to the 'fairies'. In preparation for this day, it is helpful for parents to reduce the number of dummies available in the house so that there is just one to be given away
- Celebrate in your setting with the child (and parent) once they have successfully given up the dummy
- Remember to provide ongoing support for the parents so that they remain consistent about not using a dummy. If their child is upset about not having the dummy, they may simply be tired or need encouragement to use their words to explain their feelings. Provide parents with strategies for distracting children if they are finding it hard to manage
- Remember that change can take time.

### **NDNA products to support you with this**

- [Parents: A guide to weaning and toilet training - factsheet](#)
- [Use of dummies in nursery – policy](#)

**Find more resources at [www.ndna.org.uk/hub/myndna](http://www.ndna.org.uk/hub/myndna)**