

MIND in the Making

The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR LEARNING

No More Pacifiers

Promoting the Life Skill of Taking On Challenges in Toddlers

Four Strategies That Work in Moving from Managing Children's Behavior to Promoting Life Skills

Question: How can I help my toddler stop using the pacifier?

Jack Shonkoff at Harvard University says, "There is no learning without relationships."

- 1. Make sure the time is right.** Taking on Challenges involves helping your child learn how to try something that is new or difficult. Giving up the pacifier can be a challenge for you and for your child. Sucking is one way that young children calm THEMSELVES down. If your child has used a pacifier and you now want to help him or her "break the habit," there are a number of questions you can ask yourself:
 - "When is the right time to begin the process?"
 - Whether or not you are getting pressure from others, it is important that YOU really feel that it is the right time for you and your child to find other ways to calm down. If you aren't convinced, then you need to wait until you are sure of yourself.
- 2. Learning to take on a challenge is not deprivation and is easier when a trusting relationship is present.** If it is the right time, recognize that you are teaching your child a skill—rather than depriving your child. Teaching young children constructive ways to manage stress can benefit them throughout their lives. Remember your toddler's secure relationship with you offers a lot of support in handling challenges. Sometimes knowing that you are there with a hug will be just what your toddler needs to get through the challenge of the moment.

Studies by Heidelise Als at Harvard Medical School have found that building on what children are already doing is one of the best approaches to learning to take on a challenge.

- 3. Observe what else your child does to calm down and help your child find other strategies to use.** Taking on Challenges triggers many different emotions and the need to cope with them. Ask yourself if your child developed other ways of soothing himself or herself. All of us need ways to calm down—think about what works for you. It is much easier to move away from pacifiers if there is a substitute—something else that comforts your child, such as a favorite stuffed animal or a blanket or music. You will need to play detective to figure out what your individual child does to self soothe.

Once you have some ideas of alternatives to pacifiers, then talk about it with your child: "I notice that when you can calm yourself down, you hold your soft toy. Let's try that today." Other suggestions to try are:

- distraction to a new activity;
- a blanket to rub or hug;
- dim lights; and
- soothing music or singing to your child.

4. Remember: it is a process. Taking on Challenges involves having others be helpful to us. It doesn't have to be an all or nothing process. Your toddler can give up a pacifier first when he or she goes out, but still have one at naptime or bedtime, moving later to giving that up. Older children can be even more active in taking on the challenge of giving up the pacifier. Ask your child for ideas of how he or she can do this and agree on a sensible idea to try out.

These four strategies will promote the life skill of Taking on Challenges and move from managing children's behavior to promoting life skills in fun and doable ways.

Taking on Challenges: Life is full of stresses and challenges. Children who are willing to take on challenges (instead of avoiding them or simply coping with them) do better in school and in life.

Mind in the Making (MITM), at The Bezos Family Foundation, is an unprecedented effort to share the science of children's learning with the general public, families and professionals who work with them. Based on *Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs* (HarperCollins, 2010) by Ellen Galinsky, Chief Science Officer at The Bezos Family Foundation, its mission is to promote Executive Function life skills in adults and through them in children in order to keep the fire for learning burning brightly in all of us.

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