

Do Pacifiers and Sippy Cups Cause Speech Delay?

Posted by Heidi | Filed under [Early Language Development](#)



People often ask me, “Should I use a pacifier with my child?”

As a speech pathologist and a new mom to my first child, I had resolved to never use a pacifier with my son. I didn't want to have to worry about weaning him off of it knowing the effects pacifiers can have on speech development. A few weeks after he was born he became a very fussy baby. He cried around the clock. All resolutions I had made previously were out the window. I just wanted some sleep! I tried everything, even pacifiers. I was so desperate to calm him. Unfortunately for me, they didn't work either. It did however give me a new perspective on what mothers go through and how at times it's just about survival.

Understand that pacifiers are perfectly appropriate for infants the first year of their life. They can also make life a lot easier on mom and dad at first. Don't feel guilty if your baby loves the “binki”.

Do however try to limit his or her use of the pacifier after 6 months of age and work toward weaning them completely off the pacifier by 12 months. When you give your baby the pacifier try to always give a soft toy or blanket with it. This helps when it comes time to wean the baby off the pacifier. Your baby girl or boy will still have the comfort of the toy or blanket when the pacifier is taken away.

What about sippy cups?

I don't recommend sippy cups because sippy cups can prevent the tongue from moving into a more natural position for speech development. Children suckle the sippy cup just like they would a pacifier or bottle. When it comes time to wean off the bottle try moving to a straw cup instead.

Why a straw cup?

As a mother I know we all like the spill proof cups so I recommend the spill proof straw cup as a transition cup from the bottle or nursing. This will help position your children's tongue correctly for speech and give them the strength necessary to be more successful communicators. Of course before you introduce a straw cup you need to make sure your child can drink from a straw.

How do I teach my child to drink from a straw?•

If your child is having difficulty learning to drink from a straw try using a Capri Sun or juice box to teach your child the concept of straw drinking. With a Capri Sun you can squeeze the juice up the straw to teach your child that this new tool is used for drinking. Before you know it your child will be suckling the straw and drinking on his/her own. The downfall with this approach is that you will have to hold the Capri Sun the whole time unless you are o.k. with juice everywhere. Another less messy method would be to use a honey bear with a reusable plastic straw.

What straw cup do you like best?



My favorite cups are the “Munchkin” cups (shown above), which are sold at stores like Wal-Mart or Costco. You can also get these from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

I like these cups the best because of the shape of the straw and the location of the anti-spill mechanism. The shape of the straw promotes good lip rounding which is beneficial for the /w/ and “oo” sounds. The anti-spill mechanism is located inside the cup rather than in the straw itself so when you begin cutting the straw down, which I’ll explain below, you won’t cut it off.

If children learn to drink from a straw by suckling how is it different from a sippy cup?

A straw cup can be used as a tool to train the tongue into the right position. These are the steps you will want to follow.

Once you have purchased a straw cup allow your child several weeks to get used to the new cup.

Keep in mind they are now drinking all their liquids from this cup. After the child is really comfortable with the new cup cut 1/4” off the top of the straw. This will make it so the child will have less straw to put in their mouth while drinking. A few weeks later, when your child is really comfortable drinking from this cup cut another 1/4” off the top of the straw. Every few weeks

repeat this step until your child only has about 1/4" of straw left they can put in their mouth. This assures that they cannot suckle the straw and their tongues will be in the proper position for good speech development.

“Why have my other children done just fine on sippy cups?”

There are many children out there that can drink from sippy cups without affecting their speech. But, if you can set your children up for success from the beginning why wouldn't you? If you have already gone the route of sippy cups and your child substitutes /t/ for /k/, /d/ for /g/, -th- for /s/ or /z/, or has a lateral lisp your child will benefit from moving their tongue back with the help of a straw cup. Excessive drooling can also be an indicator that your child needs the strengthening that can come from drinking through straws. As a rule, my children only use straw cups as opposed to sippy cups and I encourage my clients to do the same.

“What about drinking from a normal cup?”

Drinking from a normal cup will also promote appropriate tongue positioning. Introduce normal cups as soon as you feel your child is ready. If you want to teach your child to drink from a normal cup make sure they are not supporting the cup with their tongue. If they seem to lose a lot of fluid while drinking help them practice by giving them single sips while you hold the cup.

Here are some other articles on pacifiers I found interesting:

[A Hard habit to Break – Toddlers Today.com](#)

[When should My Baby Stop Using a Pacifier – Baby Center.com](#)

[Pacifier Use – Answers.com](#)

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