

21 Days to Stop Thumb Sucking

This system is a 3 step system, with each step lasting for 7 days. This system is meant to gradually get your child to stop sucking his/her thumb so the child is not expected to give up the habit all at once.

The three steps are:

Step 1: No thumb sucking outside of the home.

Step 2: No thumb sucking outside of the bedroom.

Step 3: No thumb sucking during sleep.

A chart is to accompany this system that allows the child to mark off each day they successfully accomplish the task. The chart lists the 3 steps with 7 spots beside each step to mark off if the child did not suck his/her thumb that day. There is also a place on the chart to write in the reward that the child can earn for completing each step.

Let's get started...

To begin, show your child the chart and discuss the expectations of the 3 different steps. Also let them know a reward will be offered for completing each step. The rewards should get progressively "better" for each step. For example, a reward for completing the first step could be a trip to get ice cream, the reward for the second step could be a trip to the movies and the reward for the third step could be a new toy the child has been wanting. The important part is to work with your child to establish the rewards, with you offering several suggestions for each and letting them pick. The more the child feels a part of the process the better!

How to implement each step:

Step 1 – No thumb sucking outside of the home. Encourage the child not to suck their thumb anytime you are away from home. Let him/her know that for now, they can still suck their thumb at home, but you will be reminding them to stop if you see them sucking their thumb away from home. Use gentle reminders if you do see the child sucking his/her thumb and make sure to mark off the chart if they don't suck their thumb. Once your child has successfully completed 7 days of this step, give him/her their reward.

Step 2 – No thumb sucking outside of the bedroom. Now try to eliminate your child's thumb sucking outside of his/her room. Watch for triggers like watching television or reading a book. Let the child know they can still suck their thumb but they have to go to their room to do it. (If your child has a TV in their room, you probably want to remove it for the time being.) Make sure to mark off the chart if your child doesn't suck his/her thumb. Once your child has successfully completed 7 days of this step, give him/her their reward.

Step 3 – No thumb sucking during sleep. Next, it is time to eliminate thumb sucking during sleep. Once you've gotten this far, usually the child is ready and able for this step. Some children will need aids to help them accomplish this step, such as a sock placed on their hand or a plastic finger guard (available online). Do not automatically use these items, only use them if necessary. Make sure to mark off the chart if your child doesn't suck his/her thumb. Once your child has successfully completed 7 days of this step, give him/her their reward.

This system has been successful for many families with thumb suckers and we hope it will work for you, too!