

Views You Can Use... Bottles and Pacifiers

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Q. Are there proper and improper ways to use bottles and pacifiers?

A. While there are no specific rules for using either one of these items, there is important information that can help you make informed decisions.

Bottles and pacifiers were designed to solve particular problems. A bottle was used as an alternate way of feeding a baby, and a pacifier was used to soothe a baby. Even though bottles and pacifiers provide convenience, care should be taken not to over use them.

Bottle - the baby bottle was originally introduced as a substitute for nursing. There were and still are many reasons why a mother might choose to use one. Here are some of the most common ones.

- She may not like the idea of nursing or not feel comfortable with it.
- She may not have enough milk or not be able to nurse successfully with her baby.
- She may be working and thus not be available to nurse.

In any of these cases and for other individual situations, a bottle makes an excellent substitute.

Recommendations: Try to give the bottle to your baby in the nursing position. That is when the baby's head is at just the right distance from the mother to see her eyes and face. This connection makes it a bonding and attachment activity. Try to give your full attention to your baby while bottle feeding. Even though others may pitch in, the mother should still be the main person feeding her baby. Grandmas, aunts, and other females in the family can be of great help. Other female caregivers can be part of the picture, and so can dads. Best is a consistent person who can use this time as a relationship and bonding experience.

Considerations: Life today is busy, and ideal conditions are often not possible. However, it is always best to come as close as you can to nature's way of life. With relationship building as a primary parenting goal, it is better hold your baby for feeding and to avoid giving your baby a bottle while he/she is in a bouncer seat or stroller. Bottle feeding and eventually meals should become special social times. Once you have weaned your baby from the bottle, give all other liquids like milk (including rice and soy), water, and juices, preferably freshly squeezed, from a cup or sippie cup when needed.

Pacifier - the pacifier was originally introduced as a substitute for thumb-sucking. The thumb and in some cases other fingers are nature's way for a baby to calm him/herself. There is usually a normal amount of time that a baby turns to thumb-sucking for calming. If that time is excessive, a pacifier may be helpful. It is always best to look into the cause of your baby's agitation and try to eliminate it.

Recommendations: Based on the study of reflexology there may be a natural calming mechanism in the thumb that is stimulated during thumb-sucking. Stimulation of the thumb pad may help to create general hormone balance in the body. Hold your baby, rock, pat, read, play music, or sing to add calmness to your baby's life. Swinging on a swing and riding in a car can sometimes help as well. Neither the thumb or a few fingers or a pacifier are likely to be needed while your baby is being calmed by holding or rocking or experiencing movement in a bouncer seat or stroller. Include your baby in your conversation or describe what you are doing in a natural way to provide extra comfort.

Considerations: Similar to the situation with the bottle, a busy life may lead to its use. When in public or at other times of distress, a pacifier may be helpful. Whether or not you give your baby a pacifier or allow him/her to use his/her own thumb or other fingers, continue to focus on the cause of the stress and on figuring out how to eliminate it.