

## Kids and Bad Habits

Kids go through periods of having bad habits. Some of their bad habits are worrisome and some are just really annoying. Parents agonize over what to do about their children's unacceptable behaviors. There are a few things they should know.

1. What you see as bad habits may actually be natural stages of child development. If your very young child is examining the lint between his toes regularly, you might think it is a bad habit. It might be, though, that the child simply finds toe lint interesting. The child will outgrow the fascination and the bad habit will disappear.
2. So-called bad habits may be ways for the child to soothe themselves. At times when they would ordinarily feel like screaming and crying, they may suck on their clothes instead. This makes them feel calm and secure.
3. Children may use bad habits to feel a sense of control over their environment. If they are dropped off at a daycare center for the first time, they may start having odd behaviors. This could be, for instance, rubbing the material of their clothing. As time goes by, if the daycare center continues to feel threatening to them, rubbing the clothing material could become a bad habit.
4. Kids sometimes do things adults see as bad habits that they do not understand. Sometimes, the kids are simply solving a problem. If their hands are cold, they may put them between their legs to warm them up. Adults often misinterpret this and overreact. If they knew the problem was cold hands, they might have a different solution to offer.
5. Shaming and punishment are the worst things you can do. If a child is doing the bad habits in an effort to soothe herself, making her feel bad is counterproductive. It will give her more to self-soothe about. This is why parents often become frustrated when trying to deal with a child's bad habits.
6. Substituting more pleasant behaviors for the annoying or destructive bad habits can work better. You can teach your child to be aware of when they are doing a bad habit. Then, you can teach them another behavior to do instead. When they do, reward them.
7. Incentives work to help some older children get over bad habits. This is especially true if they are old enough to think in the long term of at least a few weeks. You can offer them a reward every day that they do not do their bad

habits. By the time they have quit, they will have a large reward waiting.

8. Usually, the best thing you can do is to wait for the bad habits to go away all on their own. As long as you do not reinforce the bad habits by doing them yourself, the kids should grow out of them. Once they get older, their school mates will make it more attractive to them to stop doing their bad habits. Kids like to fit in.

The most important thing to remember about your child's bad habits is that you should not be too alarmed. Only when they are destructive or dangerous is it essential for you to stop them immediately. Otherwise, be understanding and gentle when dealing with your kid's bad habits.