



Blankies, Loveys, and Thumbs: Transitional Objects and Toddlers

(Adapted from Healthy Steps)

The relationships between toddlers and their comfort objects are more like relationship between two people than between child and object. That's why your toddler may howl in protest when her blankie is out of sight! This is perfectly normal behavior. Most children choose objects that are cuddly and take on smells of their parents.

Blankies and such are called transitional objects because they help the transition from having a parent around for comfort all the time to being more able to cope alone. Often children suck their thumb while holding the comfort object. It is very important for parents to support this "relationship" between toddlers and comfort objects. It can help the toddler through some very stressful and challenging times. Children who have comfort objects have been shown to be MORE independent than those who don't!

Somewhere between the ages of two and five, your child will probably give up the comfort object. But don't be surprised if your child turns to it again in times of stress, then gives it up again. Many "children" take their blankies to college! If you are concerned about your child's use of a comfort object or have any questions, please ask your pediatric team for help.

What to do if you want to limit your child's use of a comfort object:

Offer lots of nurturing, affectionate support to your child, especially during times of change and stress. Keep your toddler busy with fun things to do so that she can't hold onto her "lovey" all the time.

You can try to set limits on its use ("Let's leave blankie in the crib while we go shopping, so your hands can play"), but try not to be upset if your toddler doesn't want to comply.

What to Do When a Comfort Object is Lost (adapted from Amy Engeler, Parents Magazine)

- Try to avoid this situation by having multiple copies of the comfort object that are rotated so all develop the same smell.

- Acknowledge the loss. Tell your child that you understand how hard it is to lose something you care about so much. Be reassuring; don't panic. If you're upset, your child may get more upset.
- Follow your child's lead. Don't offer to replace the object right away. See if your child forms an attachment to a new comfort object on her own. Let her pick out her own replacement if she asks for one.
- Help your child attach to the new comfort object. Talk about what is the same about the new object and the old. Help your child see how the new object can comfort.