

5 HORRIBLE HABITS OF CHILDREN **(And Ways to Cope With Them)**

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- The most common habits that children develop and parents complain about are:
 1. Nail Biting
 2. Thumb Sucking
 3. Hair Twirling
 4. Nose Picking
 5. Breath Holding
- Although your child's habit(s) may annoy and/or worry you, relax, in most cases a habit is just a phase in the normal developmental process and not a cause for alarm

What is a Habit?

- It is a strong behavior pattern that is repeated over and over again
- The child displaying the behavior usually lacks awareness of the habit, but their parents usually are

Nail Biters:

- One of the most common habits for children
- 40% of children between the ages of 5 and 18 chew on one or more nails; occasionally a child may also bite on his/her toenails also
- Both boys and girls appear to be prone to the habit in earlier years, however as they get older, boys tend to be more likely to be nail biters

Hair Twirlers:

- If your child is a hair twirler, the odds are that it is your daughter
- The majority of children who twist, stroke, or pull their hair are girls
- Hair twirling may appear in early childhood and last until your daughter is an adolescent
- In some girls the behavior may first appear at adolescence

Nose Pickers:

- This habit usually begins in childhood and may actually linger into adulthood
- A study completed in 1995 found that 91% of adults still pick their nose on a regular basis

Thumb Suckers:

- The preference of the thumb results from the thumb coming in contact with the mouth as a consequence of random movement made by the infant
- Most thumb suckers are younger children
- 45% of 2 year olds suck their thumb on a regular basis
- 5% of 11 year olds still do

Breathe Holders:

- This common behavior is more alarming to parents than dangerous for the child
- Breath holding may begin in infants as young as 6 months old and tends to occur in tense and overly active children

What Causes a Habit?

- Experts admit that they are not sure what causes a habit, but that it is a learned behavior that usually provides a positive outcome for the child
- Habits may develop as entertainment for the bored child, or more commonly, as a coping mechanism to soothe an anxious one
- Another cause may be that they are following their parent(s) behavior patterns (look in the mirror)
- Other children will engage in habits to attract attention or as an attempt to manipulate their parents
- If your child feels that you are ignoring them, they may engage in the annoying habitual behavior because they know that it will provoke a reaction from you

Coping with Your Child's Habits

- The good news is that most habits disappear
- In many cases if the parent ignores the behavior or habit, the behavior will eventually stop because the child no longer needs it or the child has outgrown it
- Many habits usually disappear when the child reaches school age
- If your child's habit is making you develop some of your own, here are a few steps that may assist you:

1. Calmly point out what you don't like about the behavior and why. This approach can be used with children starting at 3 year old. Don't scold or lecture, punish, ridicule or criticize because this can result in an escalation of the problem
 2. Involve the child in the process of breaking the habit. Ask them what they think they could do to stop the habit
 3. Clearly and positively state the alternative behavior that you desire
 4. Reward and praise your child when they display the positive behavior.
 5. For breath holding the best response is to ignore it. Responding to the episode will only serve as a positive reinforcement of the behavior
- Because habits take time to develop, they make take time to be replaced by alternative behaviors, so be patient
 - Remember to consistently reward good behavior, if you fail to notice good behavior then it will decrease over a short time
 - The new positive habit must be firmly established before the old one will disappear