

# december @ symbio

## upcoming presentations

\*No presentations in Decemeber; presentations will resume in January.

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### Giving up the beloved pacifier.

**Q:** *My daughter is almost 3 years-old and she's still using a pacifier. She's in love with it and calls it "La-la." I can't imagine getting rid of it but everyone is telling me it's time. And, honestly, part of me agrees ... but I'm torn. La-la goes everywhere with my daughter. If she's upset, La-la is often the only thing that will calm her down. She still naps 2-3 hours per day and goes down without a peep at night and I suspect this is largely due to La-la. But, on the other hand, it feels a little strange how attached she is to it. Sometimes when she's sucking on La-la, she wants to hold one or two other pacifiers in her hands. At preschool, she's not allowed to use it, which, as you can imagine, was really difficult at first. But now, when it's time to say good-bye to La-la she sucks on it really intensely for a minute and then hands it to me - it almost feels, at times, like it's a drug. None of her friends use pacifiers and I'm worried I've missed an important window to get rid of it. Is the pacifier something she needs? Or is it time for my daughter to say good-bye to her beloved La-la?*

**A:** We can certainly understand your hesitations about ending your daughter's relationship with La-la given she's so attached; kids who have used the pacifier as long as your daughter has are generally very attached. La-la is something she has come to depend on to get her through life's difficult moments, to help her calm down when upset and to lull her to sleep. But, it is time to say good-bye to La-la.

From a developmental standpoint, the need for non-nutritive sucking (which is what the pacifier provides) ends between 4-6 months - beyond that point it

becomes a habit, not something that's supporting development. After 12 months, the pacifier becomes an attachment object and getting rid of it can be harder.

Your daughter, nearing her preschool years, is moving into a stage of developmental that is characterized by broad and rapid cognitive and emotional expansion. It's a period of rich interaction with self and world, and an increasing capacity to weave complex meaning from multiple sources. Needless to say, this period of discovery brings excitement; it will also, at times, inevitably bring a sense of overwhelm and overstimulation.

Through all of this upcoming change, we want your daughter to know that the calmed, relaxed state she's come to associate with La-la is something she can create for herself. We want her to have discovered an intuitive answer to the question, "How do I cope when I'm feeling dysregulated?" in order to face the adventures and challenges of what is ahead. To accomplish this, your daughter will need to be in command of self-soothing methods which are effective and appropriate for the complex needs that she will experience during this stage of development.

It is crucial to a child's development for them to master

the ability to self-soothe - this is a major task in the first year of life. Unfortunately, the sort of self-soothing that the pacifier provides is very basic - this is why it's appropriate for young infants who are learning to self-regulate - but the depth and complexity of the self-soothing that's required in late toddlerhood can't be adequately met by the pacifier; it can only be found within a child, by a child.

Since La-la is your daughter's preferred mechanism for soothing, she's had less practice refining her internal ability to self-soothe, which will make for more of a struggle when La-la isn't an option. But you want your daughter to engage in this struggle before she gets much older. You can be assured that she's got all of the skills and maturity necessary for the mastery of this task - she just needs some practice.

Saying good-bye to La-la will be a bit like grieving a good friend. You'll want to have a ritual where your daughter says good-bye and where you all get to appreciate how important this beloved friend has been. Expect your daughter to go through some tough times as she figures out new ways to calm herself. But the struggle will be well worth the end result: a little girl who is well equipped to face the challenges in her next year of life.