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How do I get my child to stop DROOLING?

Drooling is typical in infancy and toddler years especially when new teeth are emerging. Some children continue to drool past the typical developmental stage. This can happen for many reasons such as lack of awareness, decreased swallowing frequency, inefficient swallow and poor lip closure. Drooling can be controlled or eliminated in most situations, however not in all cases.

Try some of the following suggestions with your child to see if it will help drooling elimination. For more information on your child's individual needs please refer to his/her speech language pathologist.

Teach Wet/Dry and Increase Awareness

Teach wet & dry in various contexts so they understand the concept. Then get them to touch their face and label it as wet/dry. Praise for dry chin. If wet, say something like "Uh-oh! You have a wet face. You need to dry it" then encourage the child to wipe his/her face. Continue bringing attention to the child's face to increase awareness. Praise for dry mouth and any time you see the child wipe away wetness without prompting.

Teach Swallow with Small Amounts of Liquid

You need to teach your little one what you mean when you say, "swallow". Give little sips of ice water (or spray ice water into the child's mouth) and praise when you see or feel the swallow. Repeat the word over again so your child can learn to pair this action with the word "swallow". It is helpful to recognize the swallow in yourself first by feeling the action in your neck when you swallow then feel it in the child's neck. You can even have them feel your neck when you swallow too. Small amounts of cold water, juice or a popsicle may be best for this activity. The cold sensation brings more awareness.

Teach DRY Swallow

Encourage your child to swallow without directly taking a sip of water. You can start this by first having them sip a small amount of ice water like they were doing before. Right after they swallow that, encourage them to swallow again without taking another sip. If they are unable to swallow a second time, they can have another sip of water or you can add more ice water or juice in their mouth with a dropper. It is recommended to practice the dry swallow when playing with a preferred activity then take a break every 2 minutes or so to swallow. Eventually, you can pair a visual signal to indicate when you want the child to swallow. This might be helpful in situations where you don't want to interrupt your child but want to communicate a swallow is needed.

Teach Closed Mouth

A child might have an open mouth posture at rest for different reasons. Before working on a closed mouth at rest make sure the child has a clear nasal passage for breathing. If breathing is not obstructed then open mouth might be caused from weak jaw muscles or poor lip closure. Increase jaw strength by having the child feel the muscles "bulge" on the sides of their jaw when they clench their jaw together. Jaw strength can also be increased using Talk Tools. If jaw strength is adequate, then increase awareness of the lips by making kisses, producing words with the /m/ sounds. To increase lip closure, have your child hold a small straw / coffee stirrer between the lips (not teeth) for one minute then gradually increase time.

Make this a fun and positive experience. Praise when you see your child show increased awareness of his/her wet mouth. Encourage pairing a swallow with wiping the mouth or when sucking / slurping saliva into the mouth. Refer to your speech language pathologist for specific needs for your child. For more information read the book, How to Stop Drooling written by Pam Marshalla.

Written by: Laura Deer, M.S. CCC/SLP, CAS adapted information from How to Stop Drooling (Pam Marshalla, 2009) For more information please refer to this book found at www.pammarshalla.com.

