

Creating and Using a Chew Bin

Many kids go through a stage where they put everything in their mouths. They do this as a way of exploring and learning about their world. Sometimes this makes parents crazy, especially if they are worried about germs. But really, this mouthing stage is extremely helpful for teaching the child's tongue how to move in the mouth so that they can move food around for efficient chewing.

Not everything a child finds and tries to stick in his mouth is safe, so we recommend creating a small collection of objects that are safe to chew. When collecting items for a chew bin, think about the following things:

- Materials that are safe to be in the mouth and that are not going to break off
- Items that are stick-shaped so that the child can get the toy on their back molars, or where their molars will be if they don't have teeth yet
- Items that are age and developmentally appropriate, especially if I am going to be introducing something new

We have compiled a list of example items from Amazon that have been favorites for the children in our clinics. We hope this gives you ideas as you look through what you already have in your home and collect your chew bin items. If you are looking to purchase new items, these are a great place to start, but there are lots of other great toys out there too.

Baby Teethers

- [Sophie the Giraffe Teether](#)
- [Baconease AppeTeethers](#)
- [Nuby Ice Gel Teether Keys](#)
- [Nuby Wacky Teething Ring](#)
- [Nuby Silicone Fish Teether with Bristles](#)
- Bubble Wands, such as these from [Melissa and Doug](#), but any most will work
- [Sassy Flutterby](#)
- [Zoli Chubby Gummy Massager](#)

Baby Toothbrushes & Spoons

- Gerber Healthy Start Training Toothbrush Set
- Baby Banana Brush – Original Sharky, Banana, or Corn
- Nuk Grins & Giggles 3 sided toothbrush
- Farber Baby Toothbrush
- Cactus Baby Toothbrush
- ChooMee Baby Spoon
- Silicone Baby Spoons (there are lots)
- Num Num GOOtensils
- Many baby spoons work as well – just make sure they are long and thin, versus the ones that are wider and more circular, as the circular ones (like this one) end up going right down the middle of the child's tongue and doesn't work as well for what we are working on. Additionally, a child will not choke on a spoon or utensil unless they bite off a piece. All the anti-choke utensils should be called "anti-gag"; however, part of learning to eat is understanding where the gag happens!



Older Kid Teething Ideas (for heavy chewers)

- ARK's Textured Grabber XXT
- ARK's Brick Stick XXT
- Krypton Chew Necklace
- Chew Stixx
- Abilitations Chewease Clip On

Using the Chew Bin

The first way we use the Chew Bin is to redirect a child from chewing on something they find that isn't safe to be mouthing.

When your child finds something inappropriate to chew on or put in their mouth, now you can calmly say, "That isn't food, it doesn't go in our mouth. We can pick out something from your Chew Bin if you need to chew" and hand them the box or an item from the chew bin depending on the age of your child. We want to

avoid saying, “Eww!” “Yucky!” or “No!” because we DO want kids to put some things in their mouth (mostly food), and we don’t want kids to overgeneralize our comments and not to put ANYTHING in their mouth. Now that you have a Chew Bin, you can simply redirect your child to one of the safe things for them to chew. For example, you might say something like, “the dog toy isn’t food. You can chew on your spoon,” and hand them something from the chew bin.

The second way we use the Chew Bin is for teaching tongue skills to support eating.



If you have a child who is not putting anything into their mouth, there is still a place for a Chew Bin; however, you will have to help your child learn to be okay with putting things in their mouth. Often, non-food items will feel safer for kids to put in their mouth because, very on purpose, these things do not change (or at least change very slowly). When we put food in our mouth, it changes, which makes it much harder from a sensory standpoint. Additionally, if you

bite the food, you will likely make a piece, and now something is floating around in your mouth that you have to figure out how to manage. The oral motor requirements of this can be very tricky for kids learning to eat. While we always want to help kids learn to eat using real food, there is often a place for a Chew Bin outside of meals.

If your child isn’t putting toys in their mouth, you will want to model what the child could do with the items in the Chew Bin. You will want to have your own item to model with and encourage the child to imitate you. First, you can playfully show how to hold the item and maybe bang it on the floor or another surface like a drum. Once they are comfortable holding the stick-shaped toy, perhaps you could use it as a prop while singing a favorite song – maybe using it as the ‘spider’ while you sing “the itsy bitsy spider.” Perhaps next, you model tapping the item to your head, nose, cheek, chin, or lips. Other ideas might include kissing the item, patting it against your lips while making silly noises, or pretending it is a musical

instrument like a trumpet. Once your child is comfortable bringing a variety of items to their face/lips, you can start modeling putting the item inside of your mouth. Maybe pretend to brush your teeth, make music on your teeth by drumming the item against your front teeth, and then back teeth. Perhaps you could pretend to be a puppy and hold the item in your teeth and encourage your child to pull on the item while you make puppy noises. Try to think of play ideas that will resonate with your child.

The goal is to eventually work up to your child being able to bring the item all the way into his mouth so that it is on his back molars or his back gums where his molars will be someday and see his tongue coming over to the side of the object to explore it. This is how your child will begin to learn how to use his tongue to move and keep food on his back molars for efficient chewing. However, one important thing to note is that we want the child to be holding the stick-shaped toy and exploring it on their own body. You, as the adult, can model how they might explore the item on your own body with your own object from the Chew Bin. Please do not use Chew Bins at mealtimes. Children need to understand that we eat food at meals versus playing with objects that are not food.

[Here is a short video clip of a young child exploring his mouth with a stick-shaped toy.](#)

Sometimes, it is further back in his mouth, and then he moves it a little more forward. What you should notice, however, is how much his tongue is moving to explore the item. This tongue movement is what we are looking for.

You can work on this for up to about 10 minutes a day with your child, and know that it may take some time for your child to be ready to put the items in their mouth. However, it is more important for the child to be able to do it than for you to do it for them, which is more likely to cause a negative learning experience. We are also laying the foundation for future self-feeding, so your child needs to practice anyway!



The third reason we use Chew Bins is to help reduce gagging.

When children gag, it is often because they lost track of food in their mouth, and it got a little too far back in the middle of their tongue. **Gagging is actually good because it prevents kids from choking**; however, if it happens often, it can be a sign that the child isn't very efficient at moving food with their tongue. Practicing chewing on stick-shaped items (and foods) when you can use your hand to hold the item will help the tongue learn how to move to the side and prevent some of the gagging.

If your child gags, you can calmly say, "It's okay – that got a little too far back. You can move it forward". This will help re-frame what happened to your child and tell them exactly what happened.

Happy Chewing!