Literary Review

A review of: Helping the Thumb-Sucking Child, by Rosemarie A. Van Norman (1999)

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Suggested Citation

Drummer, L. J. (1999). A review of: Helping the Thumb-Sucking Child, by Rosemarie A. Van Norman (1999).

International Journal of Orofacial Myology, 25(1), 48.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52010/ijom.1999.25.1.6>

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BOOK REVIEW

Helping the Thumb-Sucking Child
Van Norman, Rosemarie A.
192 pages. Illustrated.
Garden City Park, NY (Avery), 1999.
\$9.95 (softcover)
#ISBN 0895298783

Reviewed by: Lori J. Drummer, CDA, RDH, BSDH, dental hygiene education consultant,
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This excellent tell-all book, *Helping the Thumb-Sucking Child*, is a great reference source for both parents or guardians of a thumb-sucking child and health-care professionals. It neatly out-lines multiple topics that focus on biological, physiolog-ical, and psychological aspects of thumb-sucking behavior. The content is pre-sented in sequential order-beginning with a background discussion on why infants suck their thumb or fingers. The chapters that follow cover various dental and speech prob-lems associated with prolonged thumb sucking.

The first focus was to define dental malocclusion, or the problems resulting from thumb sucking. Dental heath professionals can benefit from the information on anterior open-bite, tongue thrusting, overjet/maxillary protrusion, jaw relationship, posterior cross-bite, bilateral cross-bite, unilateral cross-bite, and primary and permanent root resorption. Secondary habits-like hair twirling, genital fondling, caressing, ear rubbing, and bed wetting-may be acquired in addition to the sucking habit and eventually become part of the thumb-sucking ritual Other general health problems-like impetigo, pin worms, crooked fingers, and warts that can also result from untreated thumb-sucking habits are also included.

Preventive methods geared toward eliminating the thumb-sucking habit are also discussed. Some prevention strategies include considering the child's emotional and intellectual development, because the greatest frustration comes when the parent or guardian attempts to eliminate the habit. To help guide readers through these first difficult steps the author defines the roles the child and the parent must take. Pointers on feeling validation, timing, and positive reinforcement that involve the support of the entire family are given In addition, the author also discusses what progress to expect and when to seek outside help.

Daytime elimination strategies, which involve positive behavior modification, proper pacing, positive reinforcements, goal setting, and helping the child stay on course are separated from the nighttime tactics. The nighttime elimination process is the most difficult to overcome, perhaps because the subconscious sucking activity at bedtime is widespread in all children with a thumb-sucking habit

"How can you be sure the habit is over?" is asked by the parents of a thumb-sucking child in the last part of chapter seven. The author responds to this question by including a very detailed list of suggested reading on infant care, emotional and physical development, family communication and discipline, siblings, sleep problems, helping children cope with divorce, work and family, family activities, and crafts.

This book reflects the author's genuine concern and dedication to the thousands of children she has worked with as a certified oral myologist. In result, the text sheds light on the solutions to thumb-sucking problems for both health professionals and parents of a thumb-sucking child. The author concludes, "It is truly impossible to describe the joy of watching children discover their inner strength to overcome this behavior and free themselves from the bondage of feeling inadequate or flawed; no longer subjected to chronic emotional pain and cruel responses from others as a result of their thumb-sucking."

JOURNAL OF DENTAL HYGIENE Vol 73, NO 4, FALL 1999

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