

Teaching Your Child To Blow Their Nose

♪ Blow, Blow, Blow, Your Nose Gently Now, Don't Scream! ♪

If you are a mom trying desperately to teach your toddler how to blow his nose, this may have become YOUR national anthem! Don't despair. Recent studies show that 98% of all high school students can successfully blow their own noses, and their mothers do not have to follow them about with boxes of tissues. But seriously, we all get tired of seeing goopy-nosed little ones running around, and wish there was an easy way to teach them to just blow all that junk out of their noses, with or without our help. Alas, it is not easy. But we do have some ideas to help you help them begin to get the idea.

First of all, you need to remember that while breathing in and out is a natural, instinctive ability, **blowing** in and out – either through the mouth or the nose – is a learned behavior. It is also a rather abstract idea, and while young children are good at concrete concepts, most of them flounder when it comes to abstract thinking. So, if your kid gets this quickly, consider him a genius!! (There, you're feeling better already, aren't you?)

Children love blowing out birthday candles. You can secure one in a cupcake, piece of styrofoam, jello – be creative, and be VERY vigilant. Remember, this is fire you are dealing with, and these are children. Okay, let your child practice filling his mouth with air and blowing out the candle. Over and over. What fun – you don't even have to have a birthday to get to play this game!! Lots of huffing and puffing will be involved until he “gets” it.

If the weather is warm, buy a big, cheap plastic bottle of bubble stuff and a wand, go out on the grass and teach your child how to blow bubbles. Soft, gentle pursing of the lips, and soft gentle puffing of air is involved in making good bubbles. In the winter this can be done in the bathtub. Be aware that the dripping bubble mix makes a slippery mess wherever done, so make sure there is at least an inch of water in the tub as well as a safety mat, and do not let your child climb in and out of the tub chasing the bubbles.

Or try “Paper Chase.” Let your child tear up some little pieces of colored paper. On a non-carpeted floor, mark a start and finish line with masking tape, and “time” your child blowing pieces of paper from one line to the other on his belly (this is really good just before nap time!)

Once the idea of blowing is established, then the task is to move on to **blowing through the nose**. Only baby elephants are born thinking this makes any sense. One of the best games (remember, these are all games and we are having FUN here!) is called “Blow the Hankie.” Get a tissue. Have your child take a deep breath and clamp her teeth together. Gently hold your index finger up and down across her lips as though you are telling her to shush. Hold the tissue about an inch from her face and see if she can move it by blowing the air from her nose. If she does, SHE WINS!!!! It may help to have her gently close off one nostril and blow through just one side at a time. Somehow this seems to

help some children “feel” the air move through their nose better. Each time, you move the tissue about a quarter of an inch further away. This teaches her to blow with more and more force, keeping her mouth closed, which is the entire key – and the hardest concept for children to grasp.

You can place a small piece of masking tape across the lips in place of a finger as a reminder, and let your child play “Paper Chase” using just her nose to “blow” the paper across the room. Make the finish distance much shorter, especially in the beginning. Be prepared to provide lots of clapping and cheering and encouragement during these “games”, as well as reminders about keeping lips sealed shut, breathing in and out through the nose only, etc. Like most activities in life, practicing over and over is what makes us good, and children are no exception. The biggest difference is to remember that children learn by play, so think playfully and think creatively with your particular child in mind.

As always, be well,

Dr. Hana