

## The Thumb Sucker

As a general dentist with a large number of pediatric patients, I am acutely aware of the orthodontic damage caused by thumb sucking, and am constantly searching for new ideas to help parents get their children to abandon this harmful habit.

The difficulty lies in stopping the thumb sucking very deftly, without traumatizing the child and causing even greater insecurities. We do not want to damage the child psychologically and have him grow up to become a serial killer.

At a recent dental convention, I was understandably delighted, to find a psychologist who had a neat solution: he produced tapes, to be played while the child slept, that were designed to stop thumb sucking cold.

When I listened to one of the tapes, all I could hear was a soft “Whoosh” sound. “Don’t worry,” the psychologist assured me, “these tapes carry a subliminal message that is guaranteed to stop the child’s thumb sucking quickly and atraumatically.”

I greedily bought a dozen tapes and couldn’t wait to try them out in the office.

The very next day in my office was a Friday. A young parent brought in a new patient, a very cute 7-year old with an enormous open bite, upper anterior teeth that flared out dramatically, and a very wrinkled-looking left thumb. Thumb sucking was the obvious culprit.

I was practically bursting with excitement. “Mother,” I instructed, “please take this tape home with you. Play it while your child is sleeping. Please bring the tape back on Monday morning. I can’t wait to hear you tell me that your son has abandoned his very tasty thumb.”

Early Monday morning, the mother showed up at my office with the tape. “Well,” I asked eagerly, “did it work?”

The mother looked uncertain. “There’s good news and bad news,” she began, “The good news is that my son completely stopped his thumb sucking.”

I couldn’t understand why she didn’t look happier.

“The bad news,” she continued, “is that now he started bed-wetting!”