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'The Thumblady' Helps Children Kick the Habit

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By [Anne Marie Gerhardt](#) | [Email the author](#) | January 17, 2011

Thumbsucking can be a frustrating, even embarrassing, habit for young children. For the past 15 years, Buffalo Grove's Thumblady has been helping children stop for good.

Jeff and Melinda F. tried everything to get their 4-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, to stop sucking her thumb, but not even rewards and bribes seemed to work.

"Elizabeth has been sucking her thumb since she was born," said Melinda F. "She sucked her thumb anytime we went in the car, nap-time at



school, when she was sleeping and anytime she had her stuffed animal she would be sucking her thumb."

Mrs. F. began to worry about how the thumbsucking would affect Elizabeth's speech, self-esteem and bite. A friend recommended they turn to [The Thumblady](#), Shari Green of Buffalo Grove, for help.

Green is one of only 225 certified orofacial myologists in the world who specializes in oral habit elimination techniques. Green said thumbsucking can be a frustrating habit to break for the entire family. When both the parents and child are struggling and the frustration level rises, Green said they often call her out of desperation.

"It's hard to kick the habit because most of the children don't know they're doing it. It's a subconscious habit," said Green. "One of the things we have to do it bring it to the attention of the child."



Green, who sees patients in her Long Grove office, said her program is based on behavior modification and positive reinforcement. Ninety to 95 percent of her patients stop sucking their thumbs in first 24-48 hours using her program. But she only sees children who are ready to stop, which she said is usually by age 4 and often a crucial stage in the child's mouth development.

"The biggest impact we can see is it can actually alter facial development in a young child," explained Green. "It can impact their breathing, it can impact their speech and in some cases it can impact their sleep."

Green said it's also an age when children become more self-conscious and can start to feel socially ostracized because they suck their thumb.

The F.'s began the program in August. The Arlington Heights family closely followed Green's directions and said they saw immediate results.



"As soon as she gave us the clear goal, we instituted the goals that night," Jeff F. said. "[Elizabeth] didn't suck her thumb all night and we kept moving on to the next day and the next day."

Thirty days into the program, Elizabeth was considered free of the thumbsucking habit. She celebrated with a party in Green's office — something The Thumblady does for every successful child.

"The program worked really well and we're proud to say Elizabeth does not suck her thumb," Melinda F. said.

"Done with the thumb," exclaimed Elizabeth, as she gave a big thumbs up.