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Why We Skip the Sippy Cup

(Most of the Time)

A Parent Guide from

Melanie Potock, MA, CCC-SLP

📚 Co-author of *Raising a Healthy Happy Eater* with pediatrician **Dr. Nimali Fernando**

📚 Author of *Responsive Feeding: The Baby-First Guide to Stress-Free Weaning, Healthy Eating, and Mealtime Bonding*

🍼 Sippy Cups: Helpful for Floors, Not for Development

Spouted sippy cups were created to prevent spills, not to help children learn how to eat and drink. Over time, they became a popular "step" between bottle and cup thanks to expert marketing to parents, but developmentally, that step is not necessary, and may even be harmful from a developmental perspective.

After breast or bottle, your child's next real skill is learning to drink from a **straw cup** and, with practice, an **open cup**. Once baby starts solids at about 6 months of age, introduce the straw cup and shortly afterwards, the open cup.

👅 How Sippy Cups May Affect Growing Mouths

Spouted sippy cups encourage the tongue to keep using a baby-style sucking pattern instead of developing a more mature swallow.

With frequent or long-term use, this may:

- Make it harder for the tongue to move the right way for swallowing
- Affect how the tongue rests in the mouth
- Influence dental development and the shape of the palate over time

Because every child is different, the impact depends on how often and how long the cup is used. Many families choose to limit spouted sippy cups to very short-term, or only-when-absolutely-necessary occasional use or skip them entirely.

🥤 What to Use Instead

✔ Straw Cup

Most babies can learn to drink from a straw in one day. (See Melanie's free handout on MyMunchBug.com on teaching straw drinking: https://mymunchbug.com/free-toolbox/)

Once your baby has the hang of straw drinking, gradually trim the straw so that the tip just barely reaches over the very tip of the tongue resting behind the lower gumline. This encourages a more mature swallowing pattern over time.

✔ Open Cup

Offer small amounts with help. Messy is normal and expected.

To make learning easier, start with a thicker liquid like applesauce, filled almost to the top of the cup. This way your baby does not need to tip the cup yet, and thicker textures are easier to control than thin liquids, which often cause coughing and sputtering at first. Gradually thin the texture over time.

🧃 But What About Valved Straws?

Valved straw cups are my preference for **occasional** spill-proof use over a spouted sippy cup. However, they do require kids to suck with more intensity, which can cause the tongue to anchor and suckle under the straw — exactly the pattern we are trying to move away from. If you must use a spill-proof cup on the rare occasion, choose a **valved straw cup**, but **try it yourself first**. If it is hard for you to suck from, it will be frustrating for your child and more likely to reinforce that immature suckling pattern.

Pro Tip: On most valved straw cups, you can carefully cut off the valve (this will also shorten the straw), and save just one cup with the valve intact for the rare times you truly need spill-proof.

🥛 What About "360 Cups"?

"360 cups" are often marketed to teach open cup drinking without spills, but they actually require children to use their mouths in a very unnatural way. To get liquid out, a child must press firmly with the upper lip, jut the jaw forward, and tighten the cheeks and chin - a completely different motor pattern than what is used for straw cups or true open cups. Because the face is developing rapidly in the first three years of life, the concern is that

repeated use of this pattern may overwork certain muscles and interfere with the balanced coordination needed for proper facial development for feeding and speech.

If you already own one, you have a few safer options:
• Look for a straw converter lid from the manufacturer
• Remove the top and use it cautiously as an open cup (watch closely for coughing or head-tilting)
• Or simply use the cup **without the lid** as a regular open cup

The goal is to help your child practice drinking the way they are meant to drink- not to master a special cup designed to prevent spills.

💛 **"But Sometimes…I Need Something Spill-Proof! "**

You are human. Your home is real life. Sometimes spill-proof is simply the right choice.

If you use a spouted cup occasionally, mark it clearly with a sticker or permanent marker so everyone knows this is the **rare-use cup**, not the everyday cup. That small step helps keep it from becoming the default.

🛑 Safety First

A large children's hospital study found that a young child is rushed to the hospital every four hours in the U.S. due to injuries related to bottles, sippy cups, or pacifiers.

As children learn to walk, they often move with objects in their mouths. For safety:

- Have your child sit while drinking
- Limit pacifier use after 6 months to nap/bedtime only.
- Aim to wean from the pacifier and the bottle by 12 months
    - See Melanie's inexpensive, quick and easy on-demand courses for bottle and pacifier weaning: https://mymunchbug.com/course-library/

💙 The Big Picture

Skipping the sippy cup supports:

- Healthy mouth and swallowing development
- Nurtures the skills your child needs for future speech development
- Helps the tongue learn where to rest for healthy facial growth
- Oral safety at school, daycare and home

🥤 Review of Cup Progression

Think of cups like stepping stones. Each step helps your child's mouth grow stronger and more coordinated.

🍼 Breast or Bottle
- ✓ This is your baby's starting point.

🥤 Straw Cup (Primary Transition)
- ✓ Most babies can learn this quickly. See Melanie's free handout at https://mymunchbug.com/free-toolbox/)
- ✓ This is the most important next step after breast or bottle.

🧃 Valved Straw Cup (Rare-Use / Spill-Proof Option)
- ✓ Use occasionally when you truly need spill-proof.
- ✓ If it is hard to suck from, it is working against healthy development.
- ✓ Try cutting off the valve for everyday use and save one valved cup for rare outings.

🥛 Open Cup
- ✓ Begin practicing with thicker liquids like applesauce and gradually thin over time.

🌈 Independent Open Cup Drinking
- ✓ With practice, your child will drink thin liquids from an open cup confidently and safely. Independent open cup drinking is not typically achieved till about 18 months of age, and sometimes a bit longer! That's why we start with a straw cup.

🧭 Parent Reminder

Progress happens through consistent practice, patience, and support - the heart of Responsive Feeding.

📚 Learn More

This handout is adapted Melanie's books: https://mymunchbug.com/books/

• Raising a Healthy Happy Eater
by Dr. Nimali Fernando & Melanie Potock

• Responsive Feeding: The Baby-First Guide to Stress-Free Weaning, Healthy Eating, and Mealtime Bonding
by Melanie Potock

For more tools and support:
www.mymunchbug.com or www.melaniepotock.com

💙 Be Sure to Melanie on Instagram for Daily Tips!

https://www.instagram.com/mymunchbug_melaniepotock/

Please note that some children with special needs may require a spouted sippy cup or a valved straw due to medical challenges. Always check with your child's physician should you have any concerns about which cups are best for your child and your family. Thank you!