



## Book helps kids avoid thumb-sucking

By Peter Dettmann For the Camera  
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As a child, chronic thumb sucker Andrea Van Ness was pestered by parents, siblings and teachers who repeatedly tried to pry her thumb from her mouth.

"Don't do that!" she remembers them yelling.

But the thumb remained, until her grandmother gave her "thumbuddy to love" -- a puppet for her thumb.

Now, as an adult, former thumb sucker Van Ness has taken her grandmother's idea and developed it into a children's book titled "Thumbuddy to Love," which aims to teach kids ages 3 to 6 to stop sucking their thumbs.

"It was my grandmother years ago who made me a thumb puppet -- and it worked. She is the inspiration for this project," said Van Ness, whose company, Thumbuddy to Love, is based in Boulder.

The storybook comes in two versions, which follow characters Fireman Fred or Ballerina Sue. The stories, told in rhyme, emphasize that without their thumbs in their mouths these characters are able to do their favorite activities. This teaches kids that their own favorite activities can be more enjoyable with two free hands.

"The book is about characters who used to suck their thumbs, but need their hands to rescue cats or go to a ballet dance," Van Ness said.

Van Ness said the puppets, which come along with the book, play a huge role in curing children from the thumb-sucking habit.

"I took it one step further and created these thumb puppets in the likeness of the characters in the book," she said. "The child puts these on their thumbs to remind them to stop sucking their thumbs. Its like a doll in a way -- but it's a thumb puppet."

As it turns out, thumb sucking is not only an unsightly habit, but can also have dental ramifications.

"It can make your palette narrow and it flares upper teeth forward," said Boulder dentist Michael D. Jones. "When that happens it creates crowding, leading to orthodontic problems."

In comparison to other methods to prevent thumb-sucking -- such as plastic thumb guards, foul tasting nail polish and even a tube sock duct-taped over the hand -- Jones said "Thumbuddy to Love" provides a fun and effective method to deter the habit.

"It's good to get everyone in the family on the same team working with the child," he said. "When you do that you get a lot more success."

Jones has carried "Thumbuddy to Love" in his office for about a month and is already seeing definite results.

"We had one family of three where all stopped thumb sucking in three days," he said. "The book seems to be working really well."

In addition to the stories of Fireman Fred and Ballerina Sue, the back of the book offers a calendar where children can put a sticker on each day they go without sucking their thumbs.

With the thumb-sucking-free adventures of Fireman Fred and Ballerina Sue already in action, Van Ness hopes to create more characters with new stories to help children kick the habit.

"In the future I want to develop a whole line of them," she said. "There are a lot of thumb suckers out there. This provides a constant reminder and a positive teaching tool."



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