Transitioning from bottle to cup

A parent's guide to making the change

Seymour House



Moving from a bottle with a teat to a cup is an important milestone in your child's development, but it's not always an easy one. While some children happily drink from a cup with very little fuss, others may take longer to adapt, particularly if bottles have become part of their comfort, bedtime routine or sense of security.

If you're finding this transition challenging, you're certainly not alone. Many parents worry about whether they're making the change at the right time, whether their child is drinking enough, or how to handle resistance when bottles are removed especially for milk feeds.

It's important to acknowledge that there is no perfect way to make the transition. What matters most is finding an approach that feels manageable for your family and supporting your child with patience and consistency along the way.



Why is it important to move away from bottles?

Around the age of one, it is recommended that children begin moving away from bottles and towards cups for all their drinks including milk feeds.

This is because prolonged bottle use can increase the risk of tooth decay. Drinks flow slowly through a bottle teat, meaning milk and other drinks stay in contact with the teeth for longer. Night-time bottles can be particularly problematic if a child falls asleep with a bottle, allowing milk to sit around the teeth for extended periods.

Moving to a cup also helps children develop more mature drinking skills and encourages sipping rather than sucking.

Remember, this isn't about rushing your child or getting everything perfect by their first birthday. It's about gradually helping them develop skills that support their health and development as they grow.

Start introducing cups early

One of the easiest ways to support the transition is to introduce cups from the start of weaning.

From around 6 months, you can begin offering small amounts of tap water in an open cup or free-flow beaker alongside meals, like we do at nursery. Don't worry about how much your baby drinks from a cup at this stage. The goal is simply to help them become familiar with using a cup.

You may find that your baby:

- **Wants to hold the cup themselves**
- **Tips it upside down**
- **Spills most of the contents**
- **Plays with it more than drinks from it**

This is all part of learning.

The more opportunities your child has to practise using a cup during the first year, the more familiar they will feel when the time comes to move away from bottles. At first it can be helpful to hold the cup gently to your baby's mouth, tipping it slowly so they can sip at their own pace. You can also drink from the cup yourself as a way of role modelling the action.

Practical tips for eliminating bottles

Every family's approach to getting rid of bottles is different, and there is no single method that works for every child. Some families prefer a gradual approach, replacing one bottle feed at a time with a cup and slowly increasing cup use over several weeks. Often the bedtime bottle is left until last.

Others prefer a clean break, removing all bottles at once and switching completely to cups. While this can feel daunting initially, some children adapt surprisingly quickly when bottles are no longer an option.

Some tips to involve your child in the process and make it feel exciting for them include:

- **Taking your child shopping to choose a special new cup**
- **Letting them pick a cup with their favourite character or colour**
- **Using a fun curly straw in an open top cup**
- **Introducing a 'bottle fairy' ritual where the fairy collects all the bottles and leaves a small surprise in return!**



Keep your Key Person at nursery informed so we can support you. Whatever approach you choose, consistency is the key. Once you've decided to make the change, try to avoid switching back and forth between bottles and cups, as this can sometimes make the transition more confusing for children.

Choosing the right cup

Not all cups support drinking development equally. The best options are usually:



Open top cups:

Open top cups help children develop mature drinking skills and encourage normal sipping patterns. They can be introduced from around 6 months with support and supervision. There are various options, try to find one that isn't too big for your child's mouth and is easy for them to grasp.



Free-Flow Beakers:

Free-flow beakers are lidded beakers which allow liquid to flow freely when tipped, encouraging sipping rather than sucking.



Cups to Avoid

Some 'non-spill' cups, sippy cups or valve cups have a slower flow than free flow or open top cups and require children to suck to get the liquid out, much like they would with a bottle. This can make it harder to develop mature drinking skills like sipping and may increase the amount of time drinks remain in contact with the teeth.

If your child's cup or beaker contains a removable valve, taking it out may convert it into a free-flow cup.

When bottles are about more than milk

For many children, bottles provide much more than nutrition or hydration.

A bottle may be associated with:

- **Comfort**
- **Sleep**
- **Security**
- **Familiar routines**
- **Connection with parents and caregivers**

This is often why the bedtime bottle is the hardest one to give up. If your child is upset when bottles are removed, try not to view this as a sign that you've done anything wrong. Change can be difficult, and many children simply need time to adjust.

Alternative comfort strategies can help, such as:

- **Extra cuddles and reassurance**
- **Reading stories together**
- **Singing favourite songs**
- **A comfort toy or blanket**
- **Maintaining a predictable bedtime routine**



What if my child refuses milk from a cup?

This is one of the most common worries parents have. Some children happily drink milk from a cup straight away. Others decide they don't like milk when it's offered differently and refuse it altogether for a while. Although this can feel worrying, it is often not a nutritional concern.

If your child refuses cow's milk initially, try not to panic. It can take time for them to adjust to the different taste, temperature and experience of drinking from a cup.

Beyond 12 months, children generally only need around 300-400ml of milk per day (including any milk served on breakfast cereal). If they have less than this amount there are many other dairy foods which will offer the same nutrients such as:

- **Yoghurt**
- **Cheese**
- **Fromage frais**
- **Custard**
- **Rice pudding**
- **Milk or cheese used in cooking e.g. cheesy pasta dishes**
- **Milk on breakfast cereal**

It can be helpful to:

- **Continue offering small amounts regularly without pressure. Children are often more likely to accept new foods and drinks when they are offered repeatedly in a calm, low-pressure way**
- **Try different cups**
- **Offer milk at different temperatures**
- **Mix cow's milk gradually with formula or expressed breastmilk before making a full transition**



Remember...

Every child is different. Some children transition away from bottles with very little fuss, while others need more time, reassurance and practice. With patience, consistency and plenty of encouragement, most children gradually develop the skills and confidence they need to make the move from bottle to cup successfully.