Pacifiers and Breastfeeding

What does the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend?
The AAP recommends pacifier use for healthy term babies at nap and bed time, while placing the infant in back-to-sleep position, in order to help prevent SIDS. They also recommend waiting until breastfeeding is well established, usually at about 3-4 weeks of age. Exceptions are to use a pacifier for medical indications such as pain reduction during procedures and calming in a drug-exposed infant. Pacifiers can also be useful in a therapy program for select babies to improve oral motor function.

Other things to consider
Almost every parent asks about pacifiers. It is unclear how often pediatricians explicitly recommend them based on the AAP’s recommendations. However, it is safe to say that most babies use them. As with other decisions parents must make, the risks and benefits need to be considered. In my opinion, advice regarding pacifier use can be very individualized, so these are some issues to consider.

▪ Use a pacifier with a wide base, such as the Soothie or Gumdrop. This will keep the baby’s lips and mouth open during pacifier suckling, which is how it should be at the breast.

▪ Studies have shown that babies will nurse for more months if they do not use a pacifier while in the hospital after birth. When a newborn indicates hunger or the desire to suckle, offer the breast rather than a pacifier. This suckling helps bring the milk in and transfers the valuable colostrum to the baby. This gives the baby long term health benefits, hydration and a few calories.

▪ Typically, it is recommended to wait about 4 weeks to introduce the pacifier, when breastfeeding is well established. But, in my opinion, it can be considered much sooner, such as whenever the following 2 criteria are met:
  1) The latch is good
     a. Baby is eager to latch
     b. It is comfortable for mom
     c. Removes milk well
  2) The baby cries for milk when hungry
     a. Some babies are very easily “pacified” and don’t ask for enough food to gain weight. Once they can be trusted to spit out the pacifier and cry for milk if they are actually hungry, the pacifier may be introduced.

▪ Some babies need to suckle in order to calm themselves. If a very young breastfed baby is gaining weight rapidly, it is reasonable to offer a pacifier after a nursing session is completed. The pacifier can calm them to sleep instead of continued suckling at the breast.
Weaning from the pacifier

Long term pacifier use should be avoided, as it has been linked to increased risk of ear infections and can affect the shape of the mouth and eruption of teeth. When a toddler is sucking on a pacifier, they are less likely to talk and interact. The longer babies are allowed to use a pacifier, the harder and harder it will be to wean them from it.

The incidence of SIDS dramatically decreases after 9 months of age. Also by 9 months, most babies are capable of sleeping through the night without nursing. If the pacifier is still being used, this is a good time to eliminate it, because you can simply *take it away*. You will likely have to sacrifice a couple nights of sleep, but it is possible that the pacifier has been hindering everyone’s sleep anyway. The baby likely cries whenever the pacifier falls out of her mouth and she can’t replace it, because she depends on it to soothe herself back to sleep after the normal night time sleep-arousal cycles. Separation anxiety might also be disrupting night times during this same phase of development. Therefore, this is the perfect opportunity to take care of 2 issues at once - the baby can learn to fall asleep without the pacifier AND without the presence of a parent. Remember to offer another transition object during this process and remain consistent and persistent. As always, some babies are more stubborn than others. Good luck!