



SLEEP TRAINING YOUR INFANT

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THINKING ABOUT SLEEP TRAINING?

The first month of life is exhausting for parents. Your baby can't tell the difference between day and night and needs to be fed every two to four hours. But once you're through that initial rough patch, it is possible to teach her to sleep through the night. Sleep in infancy, and in particular sleep training, is an area that is so riddled with confusion and controversy.

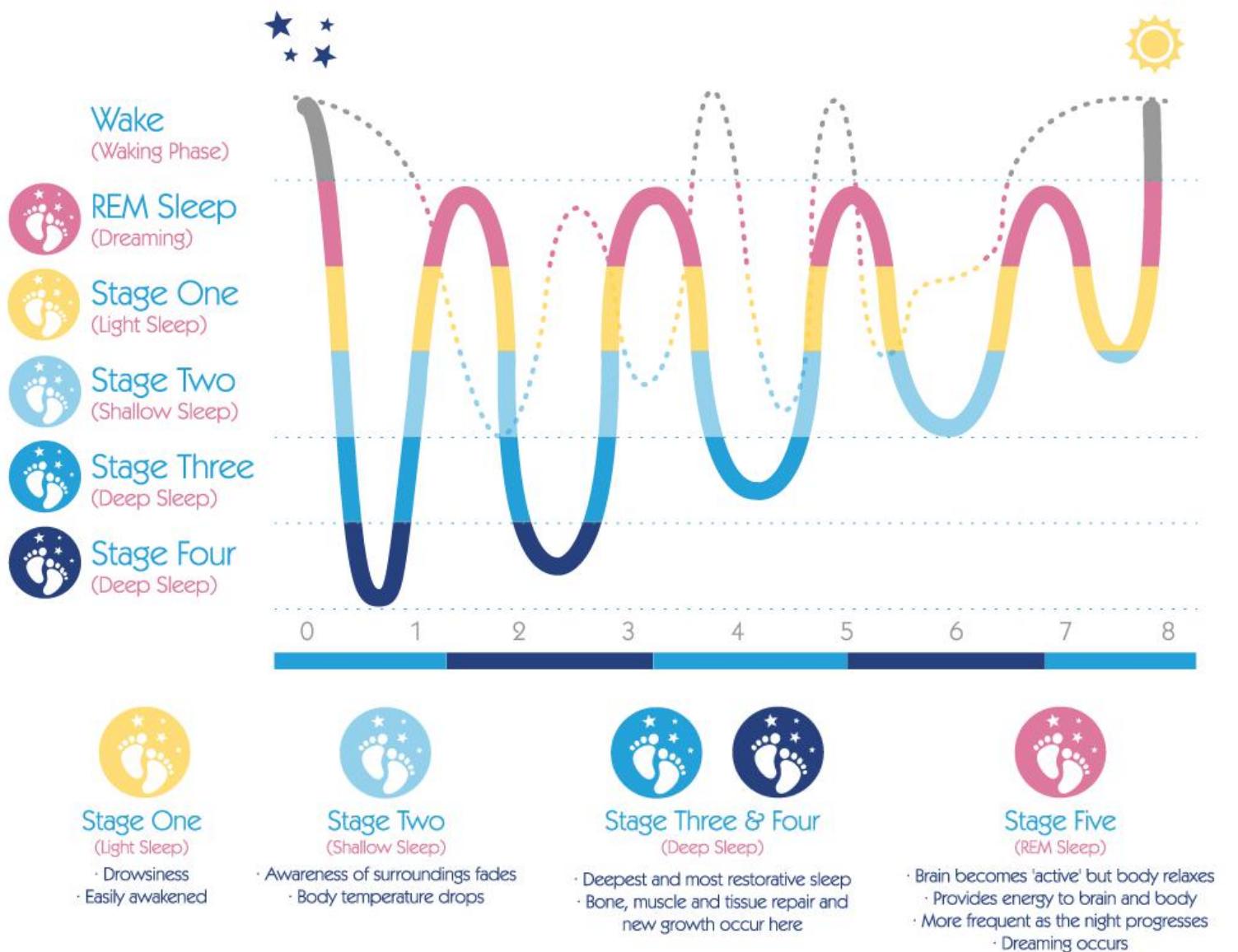
People who don't have sleep issues may think the idea of 'teaching' a child to fall asleep is ridiculous. What many people do not know is that falling asleep unassisted, like many other behaviours, is a skill that is learned. And just like anything in parenting, if you want to teach your child a new skill, it is going to require time, patience and a ton of consistency.

There are a multitude of "sleep training" methods out there - in fact, I am not even familiar with half of these methods. The truth is, any sleep training method can work, but only if you use the two Cs: **Commitment and Consistency**.

The purpose of this handout is to educate you on the most common sleep training techniques from direct to most gradual that I have found to be effective with the families I work with.

SLEEP 101

Before we get started, you should be aware of some basic nocturnal biology. There are five stages of sleep. When we sleep, we cycle between rapid eye movement (REM) sleep and non-rapid eye movement (NREM) sleep. In REM, your eyes move around fast, you don't move your body much, and you dream. REM is considered light sleep and the stage when we are most likely to wake up. NREM sleep is deep sleep. In normal sleep, a child cycles between light sleep and deep sleep. Each light sleep stage is a time when the child is more likely to wake up.



SOURCE: WWW.BABYSLEEP101.COM

WHAT IS SLEEP TRAINING?

Sleep training is the process of helping a baby learn to fall asleep and stay asleep through the night. Some babies do this quickly and easily. But most babies have trouble settling down at night – or getting back to sleep if they've wakened. Below I will describe the three main approaches to sleep training: cry it out, fading, and no tears.

WHEN SHOULD I START SLEEP TRAINING?

It is recommended that you start sleep training when your baby is between 4 and 6 months old. By about 4 months, babies have typically started to develop a regular sleep-wake cycle and most of their night feedings can be dropped. These are signs they may be ready to start sleep training. Many babies this age are also developmentally able to sleep for long stretches at night.

But every baby is different, some may not be ready for sleep training until they're a bit older. Some babies sleep seven hours or longer at an early age, while others won't until much later. If you're unsure whether your baby is ready for sleep training, wait a little longer until you are sure.

SETTING THE STAGE

Start a bedtime routine. You can start when your baby is as young as 5 weeks, but it's never too late. A routine should include the 3 B's: Bath, Book, and Bed.

Choose a consistent bedtime. Choose a bedtime between 7 and 8 o'clock, so your baby isn't overtired and fighting sleep.

Follow a predictable daytime schedule. Try to get your baby up around the same time every morning, and feed her and put her down for naps at about the same times during the day.

WHAT DO I DO?

There are many different ways to teach sleep habits to your child. The technique you should try depends on which sleep strategy you think your child will respond to best and which one you feel comfortable doing.

Interestingly, like with most things when it comes to parenting, consistency appears to be more important than method. In fact, a recent review of the research found almost all the techniques were effective if applied consistently!

So, choose a sleep training method you can live with and follow through on. Be flexible about how you apply it and carefully observe how your baby reacts. If he's very resistant or you see a change for the worse in his overall mood and behaviour, stop and wait a few weeks before trying again or choosing another approach.

Below are three sleep training techniques, starting with the most direct to the most gradual.

CRYING IT OUT (FERBERIZATION)

The cry it out approach is the most direct method to sleep train your infant. This approach is often attributed to pediatrician, Dr. Richard Ferber, and his 1985 book, *Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems*.

What's behind it: This approach assumes that falling asleep on your own is a skill that your baby can master if you give her the opportunity. Given that the principles of learning play a huge role in governing all behaviour, if your baby gets used to having you rock or nurse her to sleep, she may not learn to fall asleep on her own. And, when she wakes up during the night, she'll become alarmed and cry for you instead of being able to go back to sleep. By contrast, if your baby learns to soothe herself to sleep at bedtime, she can use the same skill when he wakes up at night or during a nap.

What you need to know: First, it's not as harsh as it sounds (in other words, it doesn't mean letting your baby wail all night without some degree of comfort and attention from you). Second, while you may not believe it, crying it out is definitely harder on you than it is on your baby. Meaning, you are going to have a rough couple of nights (or even a week) as you listen to your baby cry (in timed intervals). But remember this (especially as you're sitting outside his door, thinking you're the worst parent in the world): Crying won't hurt him nor will he be scarred for life by this process. And ultimately – if you can stand it – you're doing her a favour by helping her learn to go to sleep on her own using a method that takes very little time to be effective.

What to do: While still awake, put your baby in her crib, give her a gentle pat on the back, then softly say goodnight and leave the room. That means leave the room immediately, without waiting for her to fall asleep. You will get lots of crying, so be ready for it. And here's where the going gets tough. Let her cry for a full five minutes (time it). Then go back in and repeat the original routine – a quick pat, a gentle "good night" and go. Dad can head in at this point instead of mom, especially if mom is associated with feedings and comfort. Repeat this process for as long as baby cries, extending the time you leave her alone by about five minutes each time until she falls asleep. Stretch the times she spends on her own by a few more minutes the second night, and again on the third. A friend of mine who sleep trained her triplets got through the wailing by listening to music using noise cancelling headphones and watching SNL re-runs.

How quickly it works: Most parents who try this approach find their babies' crying diminish steadily over three nights, and virtually disappears somewhere between the fourth and seventh night, replaced perhaps by a bit of fussing or short burst of tears. Pretty much, within one week, you should have a sleep-trained baby!

Resources: The master guide for crying it out is *Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems* by Dr. Ferber and it's a must for anybody who wants to attempt getting their baby to sleep by teaching them how to self-soothe. Another popular choice, *Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child*, By Dr. Marc Weissbluth uses a cry it out method to help your child fall asleep to their natural cycle without any sleep associations.

FADING

Fading, also called camping out, is a gentle version of crying it out. If you're not comfortable with crying it out, you might consider fading, which still uses the same behavioural techniques as the more direct method. In fading, parents gradually reduce their role in helping their baby fall asleep, giving him room to figure out how to soothe himself. The idea is to be a coach, not a crutch.

What's behind it: Self-soothing is an essential skill all children need to master for sleep independence, just like learning to walk. Rocking or nursing your baby to sleep can be wonderful, but there is a significant risk that your baby will end up relying on you to comfort him every time he wakes during the night. The fading approach helps parents find the right balance between helping too much and too little.

What you need to know: There are two main approaches to fading: camping out and timed check-ins, both of which involve putting your baby to bed drowsy but awake and reassuring him with your presence.

What to do: To **camp out**, sit in a chair next to your baby's crib until she's sound asleep. If she cries or fusses, you might say "shhh" or offer a gentle pat. Every few nights, move farther away but still within view: halfway across the room, in the doorway, or outside the door. Within two weeks, you should be able to simply leave the room after saying good night.

To do **timed check-ins**, settle your baby into bed and leave the room. Leave her for short intervals – usually just 5 minutes – and then return briefly to reassure her if she fusses. Some experts say it's okay to pat your baby, while others recommend sticking to verbal reassurance only – tell her it's time to sleep and that you love her, then leave the room.

Repeat as needed until she's asleep – it should go more easily after a few nights. (This differs from the Ferber method, which calls for waiting progressively longer between check-ins.)

Babies don't like change, and crying is often how they let you know. But they can also adapt to new routines so the crying shouldn't last too long. You can offer a **"lovey"** or **comfort object**. When your baby is at least a year old (and the risk of SIDS has dropped), giving her a soft piece of fabric no larger than a washcloth or small stuffed animal can ease the transition to sleep.

How quickly it works: Some parents see improvement within a few days. Most babies will sleep on their own within two weeks using the fading approach. According to research, fading is the most popular way to sleep train a baby.

Resources: *The Happy Sleeper* by Heather Turgeon is a great and popular book for parents who are trying the fading technique. There is also an excellent website by the same name. *The Sleep Lady's Good Night, Sleep Tight* by Kim West is another good book.

NO TEARS APPROACH

If you don't like the idea of leaving your baby to cry alone – or you've tried cry it out methods and they didn't work for you – you may want to consider a more gradual approach that involves fewer tears.

What's behind it: Those who favour a no-tears approach believe that bedtime offers an opportunity to connect with your child by developing quiet and comfortable nighttime rituals and by quickly responding to your baby's requests for food and comfort.

Some of these experts think cry it out methods are not good for babies. Elizabeth Pantley (author of the popular book, *The No-Cry Sleep Solution*), believes that cry it out techniques can give your child negative associations with bedtime and sleep that could last a lifetime.

Conversely, sleep experts who support the cry it out approach (as well as most pediatricians and psychologists) disagree. They say it isn't traumatic for babies to cry alone for short periods of time with frequent check-ins by parents – and the end result is a well-rested, happier child. They say no tears sleep strategies may cause babies to be overly dependent on comfort from a parent at bedtime, making it harder for them to learn to soothe themselves to sleep.

What you need to know: With no tears sleep training, parents will stay in the room at the start of sleep time, and for awhile after any night wakings. This allows the parent to provide plenty of comfort and support as baby works to fall back to sleep; it also helps to minimize or eliminate crying.

What to do: When your baby begins to fuss at bedtime or nap time, or in the middle of the night, you pick your baby up to offer plenty of comfort and soothing. Then, when your baby is calm (and this is key), you put your baby back in bed drowsy but awake, so that she can practice falling asleep without your help. This method is sometimes called the pick up and put down method. You continue doing this until your baby falls asleep.

If you attempt a no tears sleep training method, you may want to use the "5 S's:" Swaddle, Side-Stomach Position, Shush, Swing and Suck.

Swaddle. Swaddling recreates the snug packaging inside the womb. It decreases startling and increases sleep. To swaddle correctly, wrap arms snug – straight at the side – but let the hips be loose and flexed. Use a large square blanket, but don't overheat, and don't cover your baby's head or allow unravelling.

Side or Stomach Position. The back is the only safe position for sleeping but it's the worst position for calming fussiness. This "S" can be activated by holding a baby on her side, on her stomach or over your shoulder. You'll see your baby mellow in no time.

Shush. Babies don't need total silence to sleep. In the womb the sound of the blood flow is louder than a vacuum cleaner! At its simplest, you apply the "shush" step by loudly saying "shhh" into your baby's ear as you hold her on her side or tummy. Put your lips right next to your baby's ear and "shhh" loudly. Use white noise to help your baby settle and fall asleep. Shush as loudly as your baby is crying. As she calms down, lower the volume of your shushing to match. In addition, you may wish to play some white noise while your baby sleeps.

Swing. Some common rhythmic movements include: rocking, dancing, baby swings, baby bouncers on vibrate, rhythmic pats on the back or bottom, baby carriers, car rides, baby squats, and walks. Start out fast and jiggly with your movement and get calmer and slower as baby calms down. Make sure you let his head jiggle a tiny bit too while supporting it. It is this tiny amount of Jello-like jiggling of the head that helps the most.

Sucking. Whether it is the bottle, breast, finger or pacifier, babies like to suck. It is extremely soothing to them. Sucking will help keep a baby calm and will even cause him to become more calm. It is much easier to get a baby to take a pacifier etc. when she has calmed down which is why sucking comes last with the 5 S's.

How quickly it works: All of the no tears advocates caution that helping your child learn to sleep through the night is not an overnight process; in fact it may take several weeks or even months. If you feel that you are not getting anywhere with these techniques, or if you decide that you'd rather have a few tears to get the job done faster, you may want to transition to a cry it out method.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Start sleep training at nighttime, not nap time. Babies sleep better at night, so start there.
- Feeding too close to sleep times, even if your child is not falling asleep eating, can hurt sleep.
- Overtired babies have a harder time falling asleep because they are fussy.
- Sleep training is tough. It's hard. It's never fun. But the pain is worth the prize when you have a child that falls asleep easily, stays asleep longer, and truly LOVES to sleep.