

SLEEP ENVIRONMENT (Module 3)

Lesson 3: Other things that can help optimize the sleep environment

Let's look at some other factors that can help optimize your child's sleep environment for better sleep and an easier sleep training process.

Lesson 3.1 - White noise

White noise can be an excellent tool to encourage better sleep and an easier bedtime, especially if the sleep environment is naturally too loud or too quiet. Newborns are used to having constant background noise in the womb, and it can be very soothing for them to recreate this once they are born. Even older babies don't have the self-regulation needed to blend out external stimuli, and white noise can help by minimizing distractions, masking sudden household or outside noises, and keeping the sleep environment constant.

White noise is often most helpful from 0-12 months, however it can also be helpful later on for toddlers that are struggling with sleep issues, when adjusting siblings to sharing a room, and while traveling. White noise can be played through speakers (for highest sound quality) from a white noise app (you'll find a few suggestions down below) or ideally from a white noise machine. Keep in mind that if a child falls asleep with white noise it is best to leave it on for the whole nap/night to keep the environment as constant as possible, otherwise they are more likely to wake up during the light sleep phase. So look for options that have a 12-hr continuous play setting.

White noise can be played quite loudly when your little one is crying, but the noise should be reduced to a maximum of 50 decibels once your child is calm and falling asleep. It should not be played directly next to your child or directly in the crib, but should be further away from the crib. You can also play white noise when out and about if your child is struggling to settle in the carrier or stroller.

Some parents are worried that white noise will become another sleep crutch and are hesitant to use it. Yes, white noise will become a sleep association for your child, but it's one of the easiest sleep support tools to wean off when they are ready and won't hinder their ability to put themselves to sleep or connect their sleep cycles! Simply use white noise as long as you feel it is necessary, and then gradually lower the volume and fade out when you feel your child no longer needs it. It can be hard to determine an exact age, so once your child is over 12 months old, you can test their need for white noise every couple of months by turning it down over a few days and seeing how it affects (or doesn't affect) their sleep.

Options for white noise:

- Sound Sleeper App (for iPhone) or Baby Sleep White Noise App (for Android)
- MyHummy Bear (only the Sleep Sensor or Bluetooth options, with 12hr non-stop mode)
- White noise machine (such as the Marpac Rohm)
- Spotify - an old smartphone routed through a Bluetooth speaker works great

Go to your worksheets now and answer the questions for **Module 3, Lesson 3.1 - White Noise.**

Lesson 3.2 - Temperature

Ideally, your child's room temperature should be on the cooler side, between 16-20°C. Regardless of temperature, it is important to dress your little one appropriately. A good rule of thumb is to dress them with one extra layer than you need to sleep comfortably. It is very important to keep safe sleep practices in mind. Thus, if your baby is 12 months or younger, do not use blankets or duvets, but increase layers of onesies/pajamas and use a warm sleeping bag.

You can use the TOG (Thermal Overall Grade) table below to decide how thick of a sleeping bag you need for your child.

TOG	27°C + /80°F +	24-27°C /75-80°F	21-24°C /70-75°F	18-21°C /64-70°F	15-18°C /59-64°F	15°C - /59°F - ❄️
0.2 TOG 						
0.5 TOG 						
1.0 TOG 						
2.5 TOG 						
3.5 TOG 						

We recommend using a sleeping bag as long as possible, or switch to a sleep sack with legs once your toddler is in a big bed. This will ensure that your child remains covered and warm at night, as children don't usually keep their blanket on until at least 4-6 years of age, not to mention that blankets present a suffocation hazard for younger babies. A sleeping bag provides a non-verbal cue to your child that it is sleep time, and can help prevent toddlers from climbing out of the crib. Use it at nap-times as well as at bedtime.

The coldest part of the night and the time when your child's body temperature is naturally at its lowest is usually between 4-6 am (which, if you remember the sleep stages graph from the PHYSIOLOGY & DEVELOPMENT module, is also when your child will be mostly in a light sleep phase!). **That means that if your little one is getting cold at this time of the night, they are more likely to wake and have a harder time falling asleep afterwards. If your child regularly wakes during this time period, then make sure to double check that pajamas and sleep-sack are the appropriate warmth.**

Go to your worksheets now and answer the questions for **Module 3, Lesson 3.2 - Temperature.**

Lesson 3.3 - Movement

Not only do we need to give some consideration to where your child sleeps during the night, but also during the day. Here it's more common that parents will want to use strollers, carriers, rockers, etc for naptime. Often, it's something that worked well for you during the newborn days, because most newborns love to sleep with movement. It reminds them of being swayed back and forth in the womb when mama was walking.

Once your baby is over 4 months, naps with movement may become problematic for several reasons.

- 1) Movement can become a sleep association (more on that in Module 7), meaning you need to keep the movement constant to help your child connect their sleep cycles and achieve a long nap. This may also have a negative effect on night sleep, as sleep habits become engrained.
- 2) Kids who are used to sleeping in the stroller are often unable to fall asleep for naps indoors or will only catnap inside, meaning you are forced to go for stroller walks every single day, come rain or shine.
- 3) The stroller or carrier is hardly the most sleep conducive environment, meaning it can be harder to achieve a long nap because of the light and noise your little one is exposed to.
- 4) Movement during sleep may decrease the quality of the nap as kids get older, because it can prevent the child from falling into a deep sleep, which means that even if they get the right quantity of day sleep, they may still end up overtired by bedtime.

This is why we recommend that from 4 months onward, your child does at least one nap in bed with no movement (preferably the long lunch time nap - we'll discuss why in the module on DAY ROUTINES!). Not only does this give your child practice sleeping in

their bed and give them restorative sleep in the middle of their day, but it also prevents overtiredness. (This is one of the most important things we need to do to improve your child's sleep!!)

Go to your worksheets now and answer the questions for **Module 3, Lesson 3.3 - Movement.**

Lesson 3.4 - Transitional objects (aka "lovey", "cuddly")

To encourage self-settling you may want to introduce a small lovey or cuddle cloth. This can especially help when your little one starts going through stages of separation anxiety or big changes. **Choose a soft small handkerchief-sized lovey (max. 30cm x 30cm) and begin to place this between you and your child as you cuddle or feed before bed, so that it has your comforting smell.** If your child is still between the ages of 4-7 months, we don't recommend you put it in bed with them at this age, as it can present a suffocation hazard. However, by introducing it early you can set the foundation for them using the lovey as a transitional object. Once they are 6-7 months old or more AND show the coordination skills of removing items from their face, you can give it to your little one to sleep with at naptime and bedtime. This becomes a non-verbal sign for sleepy-time.

Some children don't develop an attachment to a transitional object, and that is no problem. As you wean them off other sleep associations, try to introduce your child to a lovey, but don't force it.