

SLEEP ENVIRONMENT (Module 3)

Lesson 4: Safe Sleep

Lesson 4.1 - Safe Sleep Guidelines

While there are many different and complicated factors that influence a baby's risk for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), experts agree that making sure your child's sleep environment is safe is one of the best ways to protect your baby (not only against SIDS, but also accidental suffocation or strangulation).

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and WHO recommend that parents room-share (**parent in their bed, baby in a side-car crib or separate crib**) with their babies till at least 6 months of age, and till 12 months if possible, ideally in a side-car cot (for newborns) or crib next to the parents' bed (separate sleep surface). This has shown to improve breastfeeding outcomes and also reduces the risks of SIDS as the mother's breathing helps regulate the infant's breathing. We follow these official guidelines and suggest room-sharing until 6 months of age, and then encourage you to reevaluate the situation regularly between 6-12 months.

Safe Sleep Guidelines:

- Your child should have their own sleep space in their parents' room for 6-12 months. This practice has been shown to reduce the risk of SIDS up to 50%.
- Mattress and cot should meet safety standards, and mattress should be firm and flat.
- No loose bedding, blankets, pillows, crib bumpers, or toys should be in the bed.
- Your child should be kept away from cigarette smoke, and parents and caregivers should avoid alcohol and drug use.
- If using a swaddle, the swaddle should be firm and not able to ride up over the baby's face.
- Avoid your child overheating. Make sure your little one is dressed appropriately for the room temperature (ideally between 16-20 degrees C), and do not cover

your child's head with a hat or anything else, as this can interfere with their body temperature regulation.

- A baby should always be placed on the back to sleep (supine position)
- Breastfeed baby for the first 6 months, if possible.
- Never sleep with your baby on the couch or in a sofa chair.

In recent years, there has been a lot of discussion about whether bed-sharing (parent and child sleeping on the same surface) is safe or not. Today most experts agree that bed-sharing can be safe, but only when all safe sleep guidelines are fulfilled.

If you choose to bed-share, make sure to go through the bed-sharing safe sleep checklist that's in your worksheet.

Lesson 4.2 - Additional safety measures

Safe sleep isn't all about preventing SIDS either. It's about making sure that your little one's sleep space is safe and age-appropriate. Here are some more factors to keep in mind:

Lower your child's mattress to the lowest setting as soon as they can sit independently or begin pulling themselves up to standing. They may begin to practice standing up in their sleep in bed. So make sure they are low enough that when they pull themselves to standing there is no risk of them falling/climbing out of bed.

Remove crib bumpers. Crib bumpers are not recommended in general, but some families choose to keep them or use mesh ones, especially when their little ones are learning to roll around and crawl. However, once a child has learned to pull up, they may start to try to use the crib bumper as a step for climbing out of the crib. Remove the crib bumpers to prevent any accidents. A few little bumps around the crib bars is way less harmful than falling out of the crib!

Swaddling can still be a great tool between 4-6 months of age to help curb your baby's Moro reflex and help them to fall asleep and stay asleep for more than 45 minutes. We just need to keep safe sleep in mind when swaddling - that baby does not overheat (being dressed too warmly under the swaddle), that they are swaddled in a hip-healthy way (hips, legs and feet able to move freely) and that they are not rolling when swaddled.

Read more later in this module about when and how to wean your baby from the swaddle in Lesson 6 on "Bed Transitions".

Pillows - don't use one! The official recommendation is no pillows for babies and toddlers until they are at least 2 years old AND have transitioned from the crib to a big bed (which usually happens between 2-3 years old). Pillows present a suffocation hazard, and are not needed by babies and toddlers. Once a child has transitioned to their own big bed, their first pillow should be quite flat, small and firm, not large and fluffy, as many adult pillows are. A flat firm pillow is the ideal support for your toddlers developing neck and spine.

Increased mobility can make some sleep situations unsafe. If your little one co-sleeps or sleeps in a side-car bassinet, and has started to be more mobile (i.e. army-crawling, crawling, pulling up, sitting independently) this may make the sleep environment dangerous, as your little one can fall off the bed easily. Not to mention that this arrangement also makes independent settling and sleeping longer stretches in the night more difficult. For more about this transition see the section on BED TRANSITIONS.

Go to your worksheets now and answer the questions for **Module 3, Lesson 4 - Safe Sleep.**