

SLEEP ENVIRONMENT (Module 3)

Lesson 5: Where should my child sleep?

If your child is already sleeping in a crib in their own room, you can skip lessons 5 and 6 altogether. However, if you and your child are currently sharing a room, whether your child is in their own crib, in a side-car bed or bed-sharing arrangement, there may be some changes that you need to make to your sleeping arrangement in order to improve your little one's sleep.

Let me start off by saying there's no "ideal" or overall "best" solution when it comes to where your child should sleep. Our stance is that wherever you as a family sleep the best and safest is the best option for your family. However, what worked for your family before, might need to shift now that your little one is getting older and their (and your) needs change. In this lesson, we want to give you enough information to decide if and what needs to change in your current sleep arrangement as you get ready to sleep train your little one.

As mentioned in Lesson 4, safe sleep guidelines say to room-share with your baby for the first 6 months of life. However, some scientific studies have shown that room-sharing after 6 months of age may lead to poorer sleep quality. When your child is sleeping in your room, their deepest sleep between 7-11pm may be disrupted when you go to bed (say at 9/10pm) and this may lead to more frequent night wakings. We've also seen in practice that night sleep may be harder to improve when room-sharing, because babies and toddlers tend to "check up" on mom and dad during the night. Moving your child to their own bedroom as part of the sleep training process may be helpful, especially for toddlers, as it's easier to establish new sleep habits and rules around bedtime in a new environment versus teaching your child that they can't come into your bed in the middle of the night anymore when it's literally right next to their bed.

For some families, bed-sharing means everyone gets a better night's sleep. However, we're assuming that you're doing this course because your little one is struggling with sleep. And although not *always* the case, bed-sharing often comes with feeding to sleep, frequent night waking and multiple night feeds. If things are already difficult, bed-sharing can be hard to maintain long-term, especially if you want to improve your child's sleep. For example, it can be challenging to wean your little one from falling asleep at the breast if mama continues to sleep next to them the whole night. For the child, that feels almost like the equivalent of us having a bowl of chocolate treats right in front of us on the table, but we're not allowed to take one. Needless to say this situation can cause some extra protest and frustration, which can make the process more difficult for both you and your child.

If your child is currently bed-sharing or room-sharing, you will probably need to give them a more independent sleep space in order to see maximum improvement during sleep training. Depending on your little one's age and mobility, that could be moving from bed-sharing to a side-car crib right next to your bed, moving the crib further away from your bed but still in your room, moving your child fully into their own room, or removing your presence from the room. Remember to always choose the safest option! The next lesson will walk you through the "how-to" steps of the various bed transitions that you might need to do as part of your sleep training.