

SETTLING METHODS (Module 7)

Lesson 3: Settling method descriptions

Below you'll find detailed descriptions of the settling methods we recommend. We suggest that you read through ALL the following settling method descriptions. Then, in the worksheet we'll provide you with some reflective questions to help you determine which method feels like it fits you and your little one best.

If applicable, talk about this decision with your partner. It is important that both parents are on the same page about the method they choose and that all caregivers implement it in exactly the same way, so that your child doesn't get confused - this will only make things more difficult and increase the crying (see Module 8, Lesson 2 on the topic of intermittent reinforcement).

Lesson 3.1 - Shhh-Pat Method (only for swaddled babies, 0-5 months)

The "Shhh-pat Method" from Tracy Hogg, the Baby Whisperer, is great for settling babies aged newborn till about 5 months. Often babies in this age group aren't quite able to calm themselves when they are a little worked up, and this method is super practical and easy to follow for parents wanting to help their little ones get the rest they need, without having to resort to rocking/feeding/driving the baby to sleep for each nap. It is the perfect method in that your baby is given the parental assistance and closeness they need, while still being given the chance to ease into more independent settling when they are ready.

How to implement the "Shhh-Pat Method"

1. At nap-time or bedtime, swaddle your little one and do your normal sleep ritual. Put your baby into bed as they become drowsy.

- *If baby is upset and having trouble settling in the crib when you first start using the shh-pat method, you can first of all try shhh-patting baby to sleep in your arms or on your shoulder for the first 2-3 days, and then once they are a little more used to the method, try again in bed. This can be especially helpful when using the shhh-pat method as a transition away from nursing to sleep or from rocking to sleep.*

2. Keep your hands on your baby's chest and wait a few seconds to see how your baby reacts. If they begin to cry, gently turn your baby onto their side while supporting the chest with one hand and using the other hand to pat the back in a slow rhythmic motion in the center of the back.

- *Pat in the baby's middle back or bum (but not on the lower back close to the kidneys).*
- *If your baby is currently learning to roll, shhh-patting on their side may trigger their roll impulse, and may cause your baby to get more worked up than calmed down. In this case, you can try settling the baby on their back, and placing one hand on the torso, pat the side of their bottom with your other hand.*

3. At the same time, make a "shhh" noise. This may need to be quite loud at the beginning, depending on the baby's cry, and get softer as the baby calms and begins to settle. (There are also apps or devices, such as the Baby Shusher, that make the "shhh" noise for you, as sometimes doing this for a few minutes can make the mouth quite dry!)

- *Make sure that you don't shhh INTO baby's ear, rather past it, otherwise this may cause ear drum damage.*

4. Continue shhh-patting for 7-10 minutes and your baby should calm down. Babies will often cry, even when held, before a nap as they release stress and emotions.

- *If you feel that baby is just not at all settling, put baby up to your shoulder, as you continue shhh-patting, and then when baby has calmed down, put him back gently into the cot and continue.*

- *When using the shhh-pat method to transition your baby from a bassinet or co-sleeping to a crib, it can sometimes be helpful to settle them laying across the short width of the crib. This helps create a cozier feeling, and is also easier on your arms!*

5. As your baby starts to drift off to sleep, don't stop the shhh-patting too quickly, as this can startle the baby awake, and you have to begin the process from the beginning again. It often takes a baby about 20 minutes to be fully in a deep sleep, so try to shhh-pat till you are really sure your little one is deeply asleep, and then gradually begin to shhh more quietly and pat more softly, until you've stopped completely. **If your baby was on their side for the Shhh-Pat, make sure to roll them gently back on their back once they're deeply asleep.**

6. Once you've stopped shhh-patting completely, stand and wait near your baby's bed quietly for another couple of minutes until you're sure that they are asleep, and then leave the room quietly.

7. Over the next few days, try stopping the patting earlier and earlier, until your baby is able to settle to sleep relatively easily with just the shushing. This may take a couple of weeks.

If your little one gets increasingly more worked up when implementing Shhh-Pat, it may be that this method just doesn't suit them. Some babies find the patting to be too stimulating. In this case, try Accompanied Settling instead.

Lesson 3.2 - Accompanied Settling Method

This is an in-room method suitable for babies from 4-5 months of age until 7-8 months, and works well for parents who are not quite ready to transition their baby to their own room, but who still want to encourage more independent sleep.

How to implement the Accompanied Settling Method

After you've done the sleep ritual, place your baby awake in bed, say goodnight and sit quietly next to the bed while your baby has a chance to settle. Most likely, since your little one has been used to a different way of falling asleep, such as being nursed or rocked to sleep, or having a pacifier, they will begin to cry or grumble in bed. Here, you implement the 2+2+1 rule:

Each time your baby begins to cry, you wait a couple of minutes, simply observing how they respond. If your baby is still crying after 1-2 minutes, try soothing verbally or with touch by placing a gentle but firm hand on the baby's back or tummy, stroking the baby's head, or saying "shhhhh". If after 2 minutes of comforting with your touch and voice your baby is still crying, then you pick them up for 1 minute. Don't rock, jiggle, or walk around. Try to keep the pick-up as quiet and calm as possible. Even if your little one doesn't calm down, put them down after 1 minute of holding. Holding too long can often backfire, and increase the crying.

Now give your baby 1-2 minutes (depending on the intensity of their cry) again to try and settle on their own before interfering again. Repeat this pattern of waiting and comforting until your baby has fallen asleep in bed. If your child begins to make pauses and/or calming down, assess whether you need to step in at all or not. Generally, we would advise giving your little one more space here, rather than always interfering, which might keep them awake longer. This means that the waiting time between pick-ups could be longer than 2 minutes, if your child isn't crying constantly, or that a pick-up isn't even necessary every single time.

The aim is to reduce the amount of soothing that you have to do, and the number of pickups over a few days. This method requires patience and perseverance, especially at the beginning. Also, it only works well if you can stay calm during the entire process and not begin to feel stressed. Otherwise your baby will sense your emotions and have an even harder time settling (remember what we said about co-regulation in Module 5!).

Wait until your baby is in a deep sleep before you leave the room, as otherwise your baby may startle awake and you'll have to start from the very beginning again!

This method may take a little longer for everything to fall into place (1-3 weeks).

However, you should start to notice some big improvement after 3-5 days.

If you may find that either touch, verbal reassurance or the pick-ups are increasing the crying rather than soothing your baby, you may need to decrease the calming tool that is unhelpful for your child. For example, you might notice that your baby isn't making a lot of progress after 3-5 days of consistently using the Accompanied Settling Method, or your baby seems to get even more worked up when picked up. In this case, you could just sit quietly next to the bed, using voice and occasional touch, and decreasing pick-ups. If your baby still finds your presence entirely too stimulating, a method such as the Intervalled Soothing may be more suitable.

This method will be able to help your little one become more confident in self-settling in bed, supported by your presence. Once you are ready to move your child out of your room, or you want to work your way out of their room, use a method such as the Gradual Retreat Method or the Intervalled Soothing Method.

Lesson 3.3 - Gradual Retreat Method

This is an in-room method, which is effective from 4-6 months of age and onwards. With this method, the goal is to work your way out of the child's room over 2-3 weeks. This method is great if you want to transition your child to their own crib, or their own room.

How to implement Gradual Retreat Method:

Start with your sleep ritual, then place your child awake into bed, say goodnight and go to your settling position, depending on which stage you are at.

During the process, you will consistently step-by-step decrease the use of 4 calming tools - quiet presence, verbal reassurance, calming touch, and pick-ups - until your child is able to settle completely independently, without your presence. These following four calming tools can be used to create a slow and gentle sleep training process which allows you to both give your child reassurance but also space to self-settle. Practically speaking, this means that every 2-3 days you move to the next stage of Gradual Retreat as below, using increased distance and/or decreased involvement to settle your little one to sleep.

We will now outline each stage with our suggested use of each calming tool.

Stage 1 (approx. days 1-3)

The main aim of this stage is to help your child fall asleep in their bed successfully. Because your child has been used to falling asleep with a lot of assistance from you, they're most likely going to fuss, grumble or cry once put to bed, which means that during this stage, they will need a lot of reassurance from you to be able to calm down and fall asleep.

Sit or lay down right next to your child's bed. It can be helpful to get yourself into a comfortable position where you can easily reach your child without having to bend over the crib. Laying on a mattress next to the crib, for example, enables you to both mimic what you want them to do (lie down!) AND to reach through the crib bars to reassure them, if needed. Keep in mind though that it is important that you remain calm and don't offer your little one TOO much attention as your child falls asleep. Your presence should not be stimulating or "fun". You are there to reassure your little one that they are not alone, but it is not your job to make them sleep. It may encourage them to sleep if you shut your eyes or even lay down next to their bed.

- **Start with quiet presence:** If your child starts to cry or fuss in bed, try counting to 100 before intervening, and just listen to their cry. Are they tired? Frustrated?

Counting to 100 gives your little one a chance to try to self-settle, while still being manageable for you to handle. You might pat the mattress rhythmically while you're counting to give your child a soothing beat to concentrate on.

- **If quiet presence alone doesn't help, introduce verbal reassurance.** During the first stage of GR, you may need to use verbal reassurance quite constantly. You can shush, sing, or hum or repeat a reassurance mantra phrase "I am right here, you are safe, it's time to sleep" depending on what you see works best for your child. Do this for 1 minute. If your child responds and starts to calm down, lower your voice and slowly reduce your verbal reassurance. Cycle through waiting quietly and using verbal reassurance as needed. If things escalate, move on to the next calming tool.
- **If your child is still crying after 1 minute of verbal reassurance, introduce calming touch, while continuing the verbal reassurance, as you feel is soothing for your child.** You might pat your child's bottom or side rhythmically, or stroke their head, back or chest gently and slowly. For some children too much touch can be overstimulating. If you feel this might be the case with your child, you could place your hand calmly and firmly on their back, side, or stomach, depending on which position they are lying in, or just hold their hand. This reassures them that you are there. Do this for 1-2 minutes. If your child responds and starts to calm down, gently remove your hand first, lower your voice and then stop the verbal reassurance. Cycle through waiting quietly, giving verbal reassurance, and using calming touch as needed. If things escalate, move on to the last calming tool.
- **The last calming tool is picking up your child to reassure them.** Before the pick-up you should first try all the other calming tools, meaning you only do pick-ups every 3-5 minutes, otherwise it becomes too stimulating for the child. So, once you've already waited for 100 seconds to listen to your child's cry, used verbal reassurance for 1 min, and then added calming touch for 1 minute, and your little one is still crying hard, pick-your little one up. The pick-up should be short - max 1 minute holding in arms. You might gently rock, sway or bounce your child to help them calm down. Then, regardless of whether they've calmed

down or not, place them back in bed, and start again from the beginning with layering the other calming tools - waiting, verbal reassurance and calming touch. Stop the pick-ups altogether if it seems that getting picked up and put down again actually increases the crying or if your child doesn't calm down at all when held.

At this 1st stage of GR stay in your child's room until they have fallen into a deep sleep, and then you can leave.

Stage 2 (approx. days 4-6):

At the 2nd stage of GR you want to slowly begin to decrease your involvement. You will reduce the frequency of your reassurance, and if possible, physically move yourself slightly further away from the child's bed.

- **Start with quiet presence:** Once you've put your child into bed, and you've taken your position in the room, give your little one a chance to settle themselves. If your child starts to cry or fuss in bed, try counting to 100 before intervening, and just listen to their cry.
- **If quiet presence alone doesn't help, introduce verbal reassurance.** At this stage, you can start using verbal reassurance more intermittently than at stage 1. Try to refrain from constantly humming or shushing, and simply regularly repeat your reassurance mantra phrase "I am right here, you are safe, it's time to sleep" or make a shushing noise occasionally. You could try this every 20-30 seconds, if your child is crying hard, or even more intermittently if they are showing signs of calming down. Do this for 2-3 minutes before introducing some calming touch if needed.
- **If your child doesn't respond to your voice or is still crying after 1-2 minute of verbal reassurance, introduce some calming touch, while continuing the**

occasional verbal reassurance. At this stage of Gradual Retreat, we want to make the calming touch more intermittent as well, so try to avoid constantly patting your child or holding their hand. Instead, every 30-60 seconds you can offer a pat or stroke of reassurance. Do this for 2-3 minutes before moving on to pick-ups if needed.

- **The last calming tool is picking up your child to reassure them.** Before the pick-up you should first try all the other calming tools, meaning you only do pick-ups every 5-10 minutes at this stage. So, once you've already waited for 100 seconds to listen to your child's cry, used verbal reassurance intermittently for 2-3 min, and then added a calming touch intermittently over 2-3 minutes, and your little one is still crying hard, pick your little one up. The pick-up should be short (max 1 minute) and without any rocking, jiggling or bouncing. Then, regardless of whether they've calmed down or not, place them back in bed, and start again from the beginning with layering the waiting, verbal reassurance and calming touch. Stop the pick-ups if it increases the crying or if your child doesn't calm down when held.

Stage 3 (approx. days 7-10):

At this stage you want to continue decreasing your involvement even more. You will further reduce the frequency of your reassurance, and if possible, physically move yourself slightly further away from the child's bed. At this point, you could be sitting or laying next to the bedroom door, while still staying in the room.

- **Start with quiet presence:** Once you've put your child into bed, and you've taken your position in the room, give your little one a chance to settle themselves. If your child starts to cry or fuss in bed, try counting to 100 before intervening, and just listen to their cry.
- **If quiet presence alone doesn't help, introduce verbal reassurance.** At this stage, you should only give verbal reassurance every 1-2 minutes, or even less frequently, if they are showing signs of calming down, or having longer periods

of calm in between crying. Regularly repeat your reassurance mantra phrase “I am right here, you are safe, it’s time to sleep” or make a shushing noise occasionally. Cycle 2-3 times through waiting quietly and using verbal reassurance before introducing occasional calming touch, if needed at all.

- **Use calming touch only as needed.** At this stage, we want to make the calming touch even more intermittent as well, so only offer a pat or stroke for 1 minute every 5-7 minutes, while keeping your child in their bed. In between, return to your waiting position.
- **At the very latest we want to stop using pick-ups by this stage.** (You may have already stopped using pick-ups at the previous stages, if they weren’t helpful for calming your little one or if they were not needed). That means, in Stage 3 you continue layering waiting with intermittent verbal reassurance and occasional calming touch until your little one is asleep.

NOTE: *If there’s still a lot of crying at this stage, look over your sleep plan, because something needs to be adjusted. Maybe you need to better optimize their sleep environment or day routine, or switch to the Intervalled Soothing Method. It may be that your presence in the room is overstimulating for your child.*

Stage 4 (approx. days 11-14):

At this stage you want to continue decreasing your involvement even more. By this stage, you can position yourself outside your child’s room with the door slightly open, using only intermittent verbal reassurance to calm.

- **Start with quiet presence:** Once you’ve put your child into bed, and you’ve taken your position outside the child’s bedroom door, give your little one a chance to settle themselves. If your child starts to cry or fuss in bed, try counting to 100 before intervening.
- **If quiet presence alone doesn’t help, introduce intermittent verbal reassurance.** At this stage, you should only give verbal reassurance every 1-2

minutes, or even less frequently, if they are showing signs of calming down, or having longer periods of calm in between crying. Regularly repeat your reassurance mantra phrase “I am right here, you are safe, it’s time to sleep” or make a shushing noise occasionally. Repeat this until your child is asleep.

NOTE: *If your child is still crying after you’ve reassured them verbally at least twice, go into their room and do a quick check-in to assure them you are still around and they are safe. Getting out of the room can cause a set-back, because your presence is the last sleep association you’re weaning. Keep the check-in short and calm (max. 30 sec - 1 min). During the check-in you can use both verbal reassurance and calming touch to comfort your little one, but keep them in their bed.*

Stage 5 (approx. days 15+):

At this point you can transition to the Intervalled Soothing Method. The basic principle of this is that you do your sleep ritual, place your child awake in bed, and leave the room. You then only go into the room again at regular intervals every 5-10 minutes (whatever feels doable for you) and do a quick check-in of 30-60 seconds, IF your child is crying for the length of the set interval. If they are just grumbling in bed, or just intermittently crying, it’s best to wait for a longer interval, or not go in at all, allowing them to settle to sleep fully independently.

Extra guidelines:

1. If you notice that one of the calming tools actually makes your little one more frustrated or stimulated than calm, stop or reduce its frequency. For example, stop the pick-ups if it increases the crying or if your child doesn’t calm down when held.
2. One stage should last no longer than 3-4 days. Otherwise, this new position will become a habit and moving to the next stage will be met with a lot of protest.
3. If you are room-sharing and not quite ready to transition your child to their own room, you might want to pause at stage 3 or 4, and move onto 4 or 5 when you and your child are ready. (However, keep in mind that parental presence can also

be an unhelpful sleep association, and your little one may only fully start to consolidate sleep once you are completely out of the room). If your child is able to fully self-settle at the beginning of the night, but then you are in the room in the middle of the night, this can be confusing and prevent the night sleep from improving.

4. If your child regresses with sleep in the months afterwards, go back to the stage that feels the most doable for you and your child, and steadily work your way out of the room again.
5. The Gradual Retreat Method is built on the assumption that your presence is already a comforting factor for your child and therefore, it should be easier for them to settle in the beginning stages of sleep training with you being in the room. If your child seems increasingly stimulated or more frustrated with you being in the room, it may be necessary to switch to the Intervalled Soothing Method.

Lesson 3.4 - Intervalled Soothing Method

This is an out-of-room method that is usually suitable for children 4 months and older and can be used until your child transitions to an open bed.

How to implement the Intervalled Soothing Method:

With this method, you do your sleep ritual, place your child awake in their bed, say goodnight and leave the room.

Most likely if your child is used to being nursed or rocked to sleep, they will begin to cry or grumble in bed. If they continue to cry, you wait an interval of time that YOU feel comfortable with before going in briefly to console your child and to reassure them that you are there, and then you leave the room again for the set amount of time. If your child stops crying for 30 seconds or more, reset the clock.

Ultimately, we want you to choose an interval that you feel comfortable with. However, keep in mind that anything less than 3 minutes is going to be too distracting as you

woosh in and out of the room so frequently. We recommend waiting for an interval of 3-4 minutes for babies 4-6 months old, or 5-7 minutes for babies 6 months and older in between soothing, in order to give your child a chance to self-settle.

Sometimes babies need a couple of minutes to release stress, have a quick cry and then settle themselves relatively quickly! By implementing this method and going in regularly but not TOO frequently, you are reassuring your baby that you are present and that you will respond to them, while still giving them an opportunity to self-settle.

The key to success with this method is not staying in TOO long when you check and console your child. The goal of these checks is not to fully calm them down, but rather to remind them that you are there. The checks should therefore not be longer than 1 minute.

For example, if you choose an interval of 5 minutes, you would start the countdown when your child begins to cry and if they continuously cry for 5 minutes, you would go in for 1 minute to check on them and offer comfort (perhaps pick them up, or stroke their head) and then you leave the room. If your child starts crying again, or continues to cry, you wait another 5 minutes before going in again. If they take longer pauses than 30 seconds, you start the interval from beginning, so the actual time you wait between check-ins could be longer than 5 minutes, depending on how your child reacts. If they only fuss on and off and have longer quiet pauses in between, it's best to just stay outside as they are trying to settle and your check-in would only wake them up more.

This is not the same as the Ferber method, which has set intervals which you are supposed to increase over time. Our recommendation is rather that you find an interval that YOU feel comfortable with, and which you feel is appropriate for your child's temperament and age, and you can implement consistently.

You should notice a big improvement within 3-5 days of implementing this method. It usually takes 1-2 weeks for everything to fall into place.