

SLEEP TRAINING PROCESS (Module 8)

Lesson 1: Preparing for sleep training

Wow! Great job! You've now learned about all the factors that influence your little one's sleep, and you are ready to bring it all together and finalize your child's sleep plan!

But first things first. We know you're desperate to get started and see change already! However, even though it may feel like you've got a good idea of where this process is headed there are a few more steps before you can start implementing. Good preparation is half of success! In this lesson, we're going to walk you through how to prepare yourself, your child and your partner or spouse, if you have one, for sleep training. Then throughout the rest of the module, we'll then walk you step by step through the exact details of how you can start the sleep training process.

Preparing with your spouse/partner

If you have a spouse or partner, talk to them about the upcoming changes before you start sleep training, how you can support each other through it, how you will respond to setbacks etc. Having a mutual understanding of the process and clear expectations toward each other will help you stay in one team even during the harder days. Bickering parents and built up blame and resentment will cause extra tension and distress that your little one will sense and this makes it virtually impossible to create a calm and safe environment for change. This doesn't mean you can't do sleep training if your child's other parent and you are not on the same page, but it will make it a lot harder for yourself and your child. Here are some ideas to help prepare your spouse/partner or other parent:

- **Go through the sleep plan together, making sure that the method you choose is acceptable for you both** (even if only one of you will be implementing it), that the day routine is clearly outlined and easy to follow for all caregivers,

and that everyone involved in the sleep training process knows exactly what they need to do in different situations.

- **If you co-parent your child, discuss their responsibility and willingness to contribute in this process**, what the sleeping arrangement will be like at the other's home and how you will resolve any conflicts that may arise.
- **Organize external support/help if needed** (eg. babysitter for older child, friend to come watch the baby while he's awake for a couple of hours so that you can rest during the day)
- **Discuss with your spouse or partner about how you can take turns giving each other the chance to rest before and during the sleep training process**, especially if only one parent will be implementing the settling method. The first few days can be quite intense, and making sure that you prioritize your well-being and rest will help ensure that you can remain calm and consistent during the process.

Preparing your child

Whether you're going to sleep train your 7-month-old baby or 20-month-old toddler, prepare them for the upcoming changes as well. We recommend 3-7 days of preparation, depending on your child's age. With younger babies (4-12 months), 3-4 days should be enough. With toddlers, you can include them more in the process, so also allow more time for preparation. Here are a few ideas of how to prepare your child:

- **Verbal preparation** - Talk to your child every day about the changes that are about to take place. Babies can understand more than we think, not to mention a toddler, and even if they can't understand exactly what you're saying, your tone of voice will help calm and prepare them. Here's an example of what to say when you plan to wean from nursing to sleep: "Today, you can fall asleep while we nurse, but in 5 days, you will be falling asleep in your crib. Mommy will be there to support you and you will do great." The next day, you might say something like "Today, you're falling asleep while we nurse, but in 4 days you will be falling

asleep in your crib. Mommy will be there and I know you can do it." If possible, use language that your toddler can understand.

- **Introduce the new sleep environment** - Show your child where they will be sleeping and where you will be sleeping. When moving their crib to another room or setting up a crib for the first time ever, do it while your child can observe and you can narrate what you are doing and why "Look, mommy is putting together your crib. This is where you will be sleeping soon. It's nice and cozy so you can rest."
- **Role-play** - Put a stuffed toy to sleep in their bed and model how you will respond to their crying during sleep training. Narrate the situation, such as "Oh, Teddy looks very tired and he's getting grumpy. Let's put Teddy to bed. Oh, Teddy started crying. It's because he was so tired and is used to being held when falling asleep. I wonder how we can comfort him? Let's pick him up for a moment to let him know we are here...(pick up Teddy and mimic what you would be doing with your child during sleep training)...see, he's starting to calm down! Let's put him back to bed. Night-night Teddy!"
- **Create positive associations** - spend time playing and having fun in the child's new bedroom during the day when they're awake. You can even let them explore the crib or the sleep sack, if those are new to them, or start introducing a lovey.
- **Track time** - With toddlers, it's helpful to track time until you start with the new settling method. This may be in the form of a paper chain, where each chain represents a day and you can cut off one chain link every morning and count together how many there are until the end. OR mark your calendar with a fun sticker and then add a sticker every day leading up to the day they will be falling asleep on their own in their bed.
- **Create a bedtime ritual poster with your toddler.** This can be a fun bonding activity, and gives your child ownership of the process. Give age-appropriate options for building the routine such as "Do you want to brush teeth or read books first?" or "Would you like to look at 1 or 2 books each night?". Children do much better with "rules" that they've helped to establish, and where their opinion was heard.

- **Try to follow our recommended day routine** as much as possible. This will be helpful in curbing overtiredness, so that any further changes are easier to make.
- **Improve the sleep environment** (e.g. buy or put up black-out blinds, set up baby's crib if necessary, remove hazardous items such as pillows or blankets, introducing a sleep sack if they weren't using one previously, etc).
- **Start loosening sleep associations** - In order to make big changes easier for your child, you can already start "loosening" some of the sleep associations they have. For example, if weaning from nursing to sleep, you can try and release their latch a little bit earlier every day. Or, when going from rocking to sleep to falling asleep in the crib, you can slowly decrease the interval or intensity of rocking until your child can fall asleep in your arms without any rocking.

NOTE: If these small changes lead to crying already, it might be easier to wait until you start the sleep training process on your chosen start date. Also, check out Lesson 4 of this module on how to adapt your settling methods to better fit your family and for ideas on how to wean multiple sleep associations.

Preparing yourself

A huge part of preparing yourself for sleep training is also about having realistic expectations. Your baby may be more clingy during the preparation and first days of sleep training. Changes are not easy, and this is totally normal! Plus, if you're giving up cuddling to sleep, night-weaning or weaning from nursing to sleep, or moving the baby to their own room, you may also experience some big emotions! Give yourself space to process, and only start when you (and your partner/spouse) feel completely ready to implement the changes.

- **Journal** - It may be helpful to journal on why you're feeling emotional or how you feel about your baby no longer nursing to sleep or co-sleeping with you. Moms often feel a lot of guilt around night-weaning or not giving the breast on demand, or not co-sleeping anymore even if it's in the best interest of the whole family.

- **Ask for help** - Think about what other support you might need before and during sleep training so that your cup stays full and you can emotionally support your child through their emotions.
- **Just breathe!** Learn a couple of easy breathing exercises before sleep training to help you stay calm in the process. There are a couple that we recommend that are listed in your worksheet.

Preparing siblings

It is important that the entire family be on the same page. You can still sleep train without everyone on board, but it is considerably harder. If there are older siblings in the family, they should be prepared for sleep training as well. You might want to have a family meeting and explain to them why you're making the changes, and that their little sibling might cry more. (For example, "Your brother might cry a bit more at bedtime the next few evenings and also at night. Know that mommy/daddy is there and he is alright. If you hear him at night, just try to go back to sleep.")

Go now to your worksheets, and complete the exercises for Module 8 - Lesson 1, Preparing for Sleep Training.