

SLEEP TRAINING PROCESS (Module 8)

Lesson 6: Common issues and how to solve them during sleep training

Common Issue #1: “Split nights”

A split night is what we refer to when your child regularly has long periods of awake time in the middle of the night, and struggles to get back to sleep. This can be frustrating and exhausting as parents! We most often see this sleep issue caused by either one of the following:

- a developmental motoric leap (find more information about how to respond to each major developmental leap in the TROUBLESHOOTING module)
- an unbalanced day routine, where the child is getting too much sleep during the day, especially too close to bedtime
- unhelpful sleep associations

Troubleshooting tip! If you're currently struggling with split nights, it may be best to first look over your child's day routine and make sure it's age appropriate and then wait a few days to see if it's due to a motoric leap, before you start sleep training. Please note, though, that during the first few days of sleep training, there may also be long awake periods during the night as your child is learning to settle without your help. This is not considered a split night and will resolve as soon as they get used to settling on their own.

Common Issue #2: “False starts”

A “false start” is what we refer to when a child wakes up regularly 45-minutes after going to bed in the evening, and has a very hard time settling back to sleep. This is usually due to acute overtiredness built up over the day, due to an unbalanced day routine or a catnapping issue, or to chronic overtiredness, due to long-term sleep issues.

Troubleshooting tip! The best solution for the “false start” is to make sure bedtime is early enough, and to adjust the day routine so that your little one gets enough sleep at the right times over the whole day. The “false start” may also be related to weaning your little one from an engrained sleep association, so consistently implementing your settling method at this wake up is key. It can be tempting to give your child an extra feed here, especially if their calorie intake over the day was inadequate. However, giving a top-up feed here will only encourage the “false start” wake-up so treat these wake ups as a night wake up by responding with your settling method, and don’t offer a feed until the next feeding time is due. Treat these wake ups as a night wake up by responding with your settling method, and don’t offer a feed until the next feeding time is due.

Common Issue #3: Room-sharing

If you are still room-sharing with your child (regardless of whether that’s bed-sharing, co-sleeping with a side-care bed, or your child sleeps in a crib in your room), this could be a potential cause of frequent night waking, because of you entering the room during their deepest sleep cycle between 7-11pm. This may break up your little one’s sleep cycle, even if they do not fully awaken when you come into the room. Older babies and toddlers may also start “checking up” on mama during the night, making sure they are there, especially if they fell asleep with the parent in the room.

In this case you can either:

1. make sure that you only enter the bedroom when your baby wakes up by themselves to feed for the first time of the night
OR
2. consider moving your baby to their own room.

Troubleshooting tip! If your baby falls asleep independently in your room at the beginning of the night without your presence, and then you come to sleep in the room with them in the middle of the night, this can actually sometimes be a case of intermittent reinforcement. This can make settling at bedtime and resettling in the

middle of the night difficult. So, if you are room-sharing, and you've been working on independent settling for a week, have optimized the day routine and the sleep environment BUT bedtimes and/or the night are still difficult, this could be the reason. In this case, we would recommend moving the baby to their own room to sleep. If you're not quite sure about that big step yet, consider moving yourself to your guest room or living room to sleep for a few nights, just to see if it makes a difference! We've seen families try out all sorts of creative bedroom situations during this transition phase!

Common Issue #4: Dream-feeding

By "dream-feeding" we mean the practice of feeding a baby in the late evening, at a time determined by the parent, where the child is usually still asleep or very drowsy, for the purpose of encouraging a longer stretch of night sleep after the feed. Although dream-feeding can be helpful up to the age of 5-6 months, for certain babies it can actually lead to more frequent night waking, because the deepest sleep of the night is broken up by a feed. Even though the baby may still be asleep at this feed, the act of feeding them here may pull them out of deep sleep and can dysregulate the rest of the night's sleep cycles.

Troubleshooting tip!

If your baby is less than 5-6 months old, and does a good long stretch of sleep after a dream-feed, GREAT! It's working! If, however, your baby wakes up only a couple of hours after dream-feeding, it's more than likely doing more harm than good, AND/OR your baby may have an association with feeding and sleep. In this case, or if your child is already over 6 months of age, we encourage you to focus on encouraging your child to settle independently by implementing your settling method at bedtime, and then to wait for your baby to wake up on their own to feed them at night, instead of doing a dream-feed. You may be surprised to find that your baby is actually capable of sleeping till midnight or even 2am! Be sure to also check back to lesson 5.2 of this module on how to reduce or wean night feeds.

Common Issue #5: Pacifier Usage

The use of the pacifier for falling asleep is often a sleep association that prevents children from consolidating their naps and night-sleep.

Babies 0-8 months

You can either remove it cold-turkey and respond with your chosen settling method when the baby protests at sleep-time, **OR** you can try a more gradual approach, where you remove the pacifier earlier and earlier in the falling asleep process until they don't use it at all. With a more gradual method, your baby may still protest the change, and that can sometimes make this slower method harder to stay consistent with, but it can still be an effective way to wean the pacifier, depending on your baby's temperament.

Here are some key things to keep in mind:

- 1) **Even with a slower method, you may still reach a point where you need to implement your chosen settling method** to help your baby fall asleep completely without the pacifier. This will most likely involve some crying.
- 2) **Whether you should go cold-turkey or wean the pacifier gradually depends on a) your baby's temperament and b) your patience and ability to stay consistent.** Some babies find it too hard being allowed to have the pacifier to get calm, but then having it taken away again, and the process can back-fire, causing the settling to take a lot longer than it would otherwise. Not to mention, if you are not patient to keep at this process over a couple of weeks, and really remove the pacifier earlier and earlier, your baby may still accidentally fall asleep with it sometimes, and this could lead to a case of intermittent reinforcement, also causing the process to be harder.
- 3) **Some parents prefer to completely wean the pacifier for both awake time and sleep time, as it's more clear. However, if you feel dubious about weaning the pacifier completely during awake time, or potentially want to re-introduce it for sleep once your little one is developmentally able to find**

and replace on their own, you can try still offering the pacifier to your little one during the day for comfort when awake. This may be especially helpful for babies that seem to need a lot of sucking or who are generally more unsettled throughout the day. However, keep in mind that if sleep doesn't improve within a week of weaning the pacifier at sleep times, and you've ruled out day routine and sleep environment issues, the pacifier may still be disturbing your little one's sleep. In this case, we would recommend weaning the pacifier completely, as using it to soothe your baby during awake times might be maintaining the sleep association and preventing sleep from consolidation.

- 4) **Some, but not all babies start sucking their thumb when the pacifier is taken away.** If your baby replaces the pacifier with thumb-sucking, it's up to you to choose whether you encourage this, or give the pacifier back. However, if you choose to keep the pacifier to prevent thumb sucking, be aware that your baby will most likely need your help to find and replace it multiple times in the night until they develop the motoric skills to do this themselves, meaning it will take longer to improve their night sleep.

Teaching find and replace

****Weaning the pacifier between 9-18 months may be somewhat distressing to your child, so we would encourage you to first try to teach them to independently find and replace it (see the "Teaching find and replace" section below for tips on how to do this). If however this doesn't work, and the sleep problems persist, you may need to go ahead and wean the pacifier.*

If your child is having difficulty finding and replacing the pacifier, but you don't want to wean the pacifier yet, there are a few ways that we can teach your child to learn this skill. Firstly, it is important that they become more independent with finding and replacing the pacifier, otherwise the help of mom or dad doing it is actually

a hidden sleep association. Many babies and toddlers will refuse to do it themselves until required to do so. So just because it looks like they can't do it themselves doesn't mean they aren't capable!

This means that, instead of placing the pacifier back into your child's mouth, we encourage you to put it into their hand, near their hand, or to point to it, so that they are encouraged to pick it up themselves. Here you are teaching them to FIND it independently. If they are not yet coordinated enough to place the pacifier correctly into their mouth by themselves, instead of taking over, let them try out a few things on their own, and only if necessary, guide their hand with the pacifier to their mouth.

Something else to consider is making the pacifier as easy to find and accessible as possible. Sewing the pacifier onto the corner of a lovey cloth can make the pacifier harder to lose in bed, and much easier to find. (We do NOT advise putting the pacifier on any kind of string or pacifier chain and attaching this to your child. This would present a suffocation hazard.) Glow-in-the-dark pacifiers may also be a good solution. And just to make things even easier, put multiple pacifiers in bed with your little one!

Children 9 months +

When you are ready to fully wean your child from the pacifier, talk about it and involve them in the process. Give the child a couple of options of what to do with the pacifier. We've heard all sorts of ideas from cutting the pacifier nipples up with scissors, to giving them away to a friend's new baby, to tying them to a helium balloon and sending them flying away. Replacing the pacifier with a new special "big kid blanket" or a special stuffed toy can help sooth the transition. Expect some tears and frustration in the first few days - during the daytime when they are awake, this might require a few more cuddles; at sleeptime, you can respond with your chosen settling method.