

The Beginnings: Birth-12 months

Mini Sleep Guide



by Chelsea Topps

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Hello There!

I'M CHELSEA

I am a wife, a mother of four, and a childcare specialist. I have over 12 years of experience working in Early Childhood Education and 6 years working with families and helping them navigate their children's sleep issues and creating successful plans for them.





Introduction

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF PARENTING!

This new journey is not only exciting and full of love but it is also filled with an incredible amount of uncertainty. Navigating all the ins and outs of what it is to take care of this new life can often feel overwhelming. When you couple all of that with a lack of sleep then we can start to spiral and get further into the uncertainty of it all. This guide is designed to help you setup up a successful sleep journey for your little one that will in turn allow you to also have more sleep and clarity for yourself.



This mini guide is just the basics. It is the foundation through which you can use to build healthy sleep habits in order to have a successful sleeper. This guide is not the end all and be all. There will be factors in your life that will need to be considered in order for you to continue on a healthy sleep journey with your baby. You need to remember that each child and family is unique. As you read the guide you will understand the times in which you need to think about how it will work for your child's temperament and your family's lifestyle.



Environment





The Optimal Sleep Environment

Whenever I am working with sleep training clients or talking to parents about sleep I always like to start with the environment. The sleep environment is really the pivotal factor for successful sleep. Unlike regressions or child temperament, the sleep space is the one aspect that we have absolute control over. Setting up the sleep environment is also something that can be done before your baby is born. The sleep environment will pilot your baby's sleep journey the moment you bring them home.





The Optimal Sleep Environment (continued)

In the beginning when you bring your baby home they should be sleeping in the bedroom with you. Having them room with you has many benefits. It reduces the risk of SIDS, fosters a bond with you and your baby, and enables you to start to understand their natural sleep patterns. Eventually you will transition your baby either into their own room or into a sibling's room. Regardless of where the baby is sleeping there are ways to make sure it is a place that fosters good sleep.



When designing your baby's sleep space there are 4 components to keep in mind.

1. The Bed
2. Distractions
3. Light
4. Atmosphere





The Bed

The bed is the absolute most important component in the sleep space. It's probably pretty obvious and I didn't really need to mention that but I also feel like it should be said. The physical space where we lay down at night shouldn't go without thought.



Most commonly, bassinets are used for those early days when your baby is rooming with you. They are compact which allows them to fit next to your bed, and usually have some sort of feature that allows you to easily access the baby at night. Some physically latch onto the side of your bed frame and some have flexible railings that go down when you reach over to lift your baby out of the bed for a feed or a diaper change. Eventually you will move your baby into a bigger full size crib as they grow and need more space.



The Bed (continued)

The stage and size of your baby will determine the type of bed they are in. The way the bed is set up and made stays the same. Your baby's bed should have a firm and appropriate sized mattress, making sure that there aren't any gaps in between the mattress and the sides of the crib.



The mattress sizes are usually standard so just make sure you are selecting the appropriate mattress for whichever type of bed they are in. The mattress should be covered with only a fitted sheet. Keep everything else out of the crib. No stuffed animals, bumpers, pillows or blankets are needed. These items increase the risk of SIDS and they aren't necessary for comfort purposes. You do however, want to make sure your baby does stay warm. Using a swaddle/sleep sack is the best and safest choice for your baby.



Distractions

Decor is important. We want and should want to live in an aesthetically pleasing space. It makes us feel good. I can absolutely feel the difference when I walk into a space that is clean and tidy and put together versus a space that is cluttered and busy. I am in a better mood and feel more at peace

When designing your child's sleep space you should also keep that in mind. A clean clutter free room is a happy room. Try to avoid visual stimulation where possible. This doesn't mean that it needs to be boring. Choosing a soft paint color for the walls or simple wall paper will give the space a peaceful and relaxing feel.



Distractions

Mobiles are cute but they do not belong over a crib. A mobile becomes a distraction and over stimulating to the eyes and mind. This is the last thing you want to have happen when your baby is trying to wind down and go to sleep.

If you have a cherished mobile or one that you really want to put in the room, the better place for it would be over the changing table. A perfect time you want your child to be engaged and distracted is when you are changing them. That way their wiggles become less wiggly.



Light

I personally know a lot of people whose children use night lights or have some source of light in the bedroom. Most of those children aren't great sleepers or have some sort of trouble falling/staying asleep. Having light in the room is detrimental to sleep. Light suppresses melatonin and melatonin is needed for sleep. Sure, you can fall asleep with light in the room.



I know I have dozed off while reading and my lamp is still on. Having light is not going to necessarily keep them from falling asleep. The quality of sleep will greatly diminish with a light in the room which means cranky children, or unusual wakings.



Light (continued)

The light source that suppresses melatonin can be caused from a natural or an artificial source. It also doesn't require much light to interrupt good sleep. The little light that illuminates from a charging base is enough to do the trick.

If you have a baby that is still feeding in the night or needs to be changed and light is needed, it should come from a far away source. An example of a far away source would be, a bathroom light that is one and you open the door a bit to let light flood in enough to see. A far away source keeps the light softer and indirect for a less disruptive environment. Direct light is very disruptive so avoid turning on a nearby lamp or cell phone light in order to see.

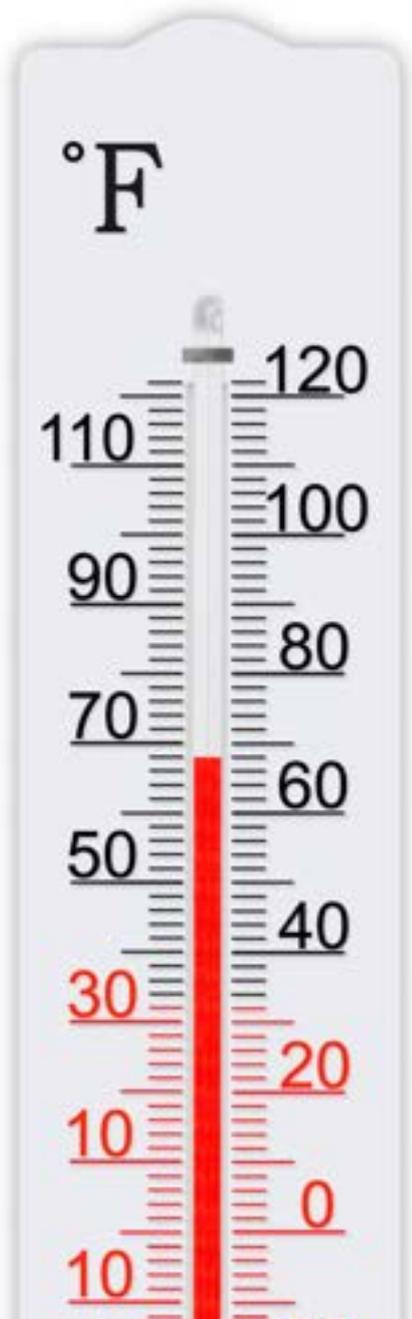


Atmosphere

I don't know about you but I need my bedroom atmosphere to be very on point in order to have the most restful sleep. Our bodies need the perfect concoction of warmth and air circulation. Air circulation is key in order to get that oxygen in the room moving around and into our bodies in the fullest way. Having a low fan in the room or a window that is slightly open are great ways to get that air moving.



Another huge factor in quality sleep is temperature. Often when babies have frequent wake ups it is because there is a discomfort factor involved that doesn't allow them to connect their REM cycles. Being too warm or too cold would absolutely make it more difficult to connect those REMs together



Atmosphere

A lot of sleep specialists talk about room temperature. This is important and there is an ideal range that the room should be kept at which is around 68-72 degrees Fahrenheit. For some, the temperature of the room isn't always a controlled factor. It could be the AC or Heat doesn't reach well into the bedroom, or maybe there isn't AC at all.

Sometimes there is both AC and heat but if you are anything like me and my family, having a forced air system going throughout the night, causes us to be dried out and uncomfortable.

All of those factors considered, there are ways to make sure the body is kept at a comfortable temperature regardless of what the room temperature is at.



Atmosphere

If the room is on the warmer side, then using a lighter sleep sack and footless pajamas would do the trick. For a room that is on the cooler side, then adding layers would be necessary.

Maybe it means having your baby wear a t-shirt onesie, with footed pajamas, and a thicker sleep sack. It is important to have different options available to be able to make a decision of what would be the most comfortable for baby to wear or the night.





Sleep Aides

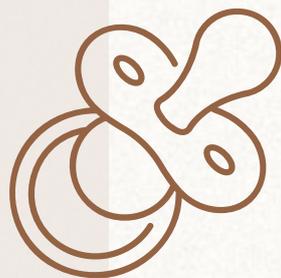


There are a few “special weapons”, that are popular among parents to help keep their little ones sleeping through the night. I am going to focus on the three that are most popular.

1. Pacifier

2. Lovie

3. White Noise





Pacifier

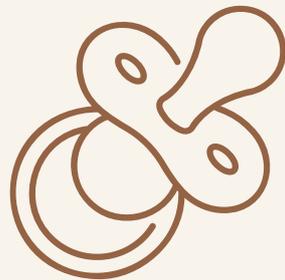
I have found that there are two types of people who have feelings about pacifiers. They are either for them or you are against them. I have rarely found anyone who is indifferent to the idea of the pacifier. It is sort of like cilantro. You either love it or hate it.



Let me tell you that I am ALL for them. They are an essential tool for helping with safe sleep. They not only are an automatic soothing mechanism but they also reduce the risk of SIDS so for me it is a no brainer. If you are worried about the dreaded moment of when it is time to wean your child off of it, don't be. Cross that bridge when you come to it. The moment is not as scary as its chocked up to be and I am happy to guide you along in that process when the time comes. For now, allow your baby to get used to using it for sleep.

PRO TIP

Keep a few pacifiers in their crib. That way if your infant wakes up you can quickly go in and put one in their mouth. Additionally, if your baby is older and they wake up in the middle of the night they can find one to put back into their mouth which will allow them to take care of themselves and prevent them from crying out.



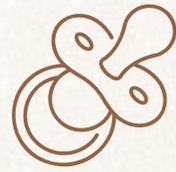


Lovie

I'm just going to say it...I LOVE LOVIES! There are so many benefits for a child having a lovie I could spend all day talking about it. I will do my best to concise it all down for you.



Lovies are wonderful tools that help children develop empathy from birth. Introducing them to a companion that they care for and helps them feel safe is wonderful and essential for their social and emotional development. The best lovie is the one that has a stuffed head and a blanket at the body. They are perfect for snuggling up at night. Make sure the lovie has a face to it. Eyes and a mouth are plenty.



Lovie

When you first introduce it to your newborn you can start by keeping it near them when they are awake. When your newborn isn't using it, store the lovie in your clothing drawer or stuff it in your shirt during the day to allow your scent to absorb onto it so that your baby becomes more attracted to it

As they get older give them to help your baby fall asleep and take it away after they have drifted off. Eventually when they become toddlers you can let them stay in bed with them the entire night.

I recommend not taking it out of the house and teach your child that this is a special friend. All of my children have theirs to this day and it is the most sacred item they own.



White Noise

I'm not like a lot of other sleep specialists. I have a love hate relationship with the white noise factor. I am going to dissect this notion so you can understand what I mean.



Okay, so on one hand white noise is a great tool. It soothes the brain to sleep by emulating the sounds that we hear as fetuses in the womb, which is comforting once we arrive on Earth's side. It also allows for sudden noises to be drowned out. Sudden noises such as; dishes clanking while they are being washed, a door closing or opening, or the pitter patter of a sibling running down the hall. It is a tool to use to help us feel like we don't have to tiptoe around while the baby is sleeping. So there are definite benefits to having white noise.



White Noise

Now here is where my opposition of white noise comes in. White noise is partially crazy making. The dependency which is needed in order to fall asleep and stay asleep is where I have the issue. This is true for most sleep aides but I particularly think that white noise is the hardest to break if a dependency has developed.

Another negative to the sound machine is that white noise can also interrupt sleep. If the noise is too loud then it can in turn prevent the ability to connect REM cycles together. The time in between REM we are in a bit of a lighter sleep. If outside factors are strong enough it can cause your baby to become audibly alert and potentially fully wake up.

I recommend using white noise with flexibility. If you do happen to use it for your baby then going in and turning it off before you go to bed will allow your infant to not get hooked on it. Just remember, when you turn it off do it gradually by lowering the volume so that it's not an abrupt change in the stimulus.



Schedules and Routines





Schedules and Routines

Having a solid night time routine is a key element in making sure that bedtime and night sleep go smoothly. There are a few factors that you should be aware of during night time routine that will help make sure your child falls asleep on their own, in their own bed, and stays asleep throughout the night.

Getting your baby to sleep before they are overtired is essential for a successful night's sleep. When infants and children become overtired it has the opposite effect on sleep than some people may think. Being over tired doesn't mean that the child is so tired that they will sleep heavily throughout the night. Rather, It means the child will likely have trouble falling asleep and also staying asleep.





Schedules and Routines

Sticking to a routine will allow for predictability. For example, your baby will start to recognize that bath time is the start of the gear shifting to wind down and be prepared to get into pajamas and get into bed.

Example of a Night Time Routine

6:00PM Bath

6:20PM Pajamas

6:30PM Book

6:40PM Bottle/Nursing

7:00PM Bed





Schedules and Routines

The goal is to get through the night time routine while your child is still awake but starting to get drowsy, You do not want your baby falling asleep before they are put into bed but you do want to make sure they are relaxed enough to lay there and drift to sleep shortly after being placed into bed.

If you are finding that your baby is falling asleep at their last feed then maybe it means starting your routine a little bit earlier or shortening bath time. You will start to learn your baby's tired cues and will be able to adjust according to their specific needs.





Sharing Rooms





Sharing Rooms

People ask me all the time how I am able to get all the children in my daycare to sleep at the same time with little effort. The truth is that there is a communal and social aspect to it. Just like everyone eats together and plays together, they enjoy sleeping together. When there are multiple children going down for a nap at the same time, they see that everyone has their beds and blankets and therefore don't feel singled out and they all end up wanting to participate.

This is also true for siblings. Siblings are like their own little unit. When fostered properly, they enjoy doing things together and being part of a team. I also believe that sleeping energy transfers from one to another and the most peaceful sleeps I've witnessed are between siblings, children in a daycare, or parents and children sleeping in the same space at the same time.

Putting Siblings together is something that you may want to consider doing sooner rather than later, especially if your older child is already an established sleeper.



Sharing Rooms (continued)

Remember this is a transition for everyone so don't stress or worry if it doesn't work out the first couple of nights. All new situations take some adjustment.

Including the older sibling in this process is absolutely essential. They are now going to be sharing what was their room and their space with someone else and so their feelings should be taken into account and validated. First, let your older child know the situation and allow for them to respond in whatever they are thinking and feeling about the situation. Make sure you address it to your child in an exciting and inclusive tone rather than a “this is how it is” tone.

Once you have a conversation with your older child about it, you should include them in the physical process. Have them help you arrange and set up the room so that it allows space for the baby.

Another cute activity you can do is to have your older child make a “Welcome” picture for Baby to hang next to the crib. Giving the older sibling a sense of ownership in the move will help validate them during the process.



Sharing Rooms (continued)

You should start the first day by having the baby nap in the new environment so they can slowly acclimate to it. This way they also get a sense of his new space before they go to sleep at night with a new roommate. You may want to also add white noise at the beginning of the transition if baby needs help soothing and relaxing in their new room.

After a few successful naps, you can start to have them sleep in the new room overnight. Keeping the white noise on during the night may be beneficial at first to help keep the older sibling from waking up.

Consider the timing of rooming siblings together. I like to look at the calendar and see when there are some days off of school and plan room sharing around those times. That way if the older sibling does get woken up they can sleep in the next morning or at least have a relaxing day at home if needed.



Reinforcement





Reinforcement

Consistency is KEY and Patience is a MUST. As a parent, there is so much work and intention that goes into taking care of your baby and it will continue throughout all of the stages of their life. The success of a healthy sleeper will only come if you stick it out through the times that you feel like you want to quit.

Staying consistent and patient are going to be the two qualities that will give your child the structure and discipline they need in order to stay on track. Don't get me wrong. This is hard work. Way easier said than done.

Don't be afraid to take a " Parenting Pause" A moment where you step out and gather your thoughts and emotions before continuing on. Make sure you use the people around you for support in any way you can. Even if all you need is someone to chat with. Taking care of your well being and self will allow for the consistency and patience to be more achievable.



The path to a perfect sleeper comes with bumps and dips. There will be times that you will need to adjust in order to continue on the path.

Remember your child is not a robot and neither are you. We all have different energies, temperaments, feelings, and outlooks on life.



Use the guide as a reminder of details that will help keep you on *YOUR* path.