

How to Sleep Train: A Free Resource Guide for Parents

Supporting Your Child's Journey to Independent Sleep

What Is Sleep Training?

Sleep training is the process of teaching your baby to fall asleep without assistance, such as rocking, feeding, being held, or even just needing your presence to fall asleep. This means helping your child learn to settle themselves at bedtime and return themselves to sleep if they wake up during the night.

Why Independent Sleep Is Important

Independent sleep is a vital skill for children, promoting better rest for both the child and the family. When babies learn to self-soothe and fall asleep on their own, they tend to experience more restful nights with fewer wakeups. This not only supports their growth and development but also helps caregivers get the sleep they need to feel energized and patient.

Laying the Groundwork for Sleep Training

Before starting sleep training, it's important to set your child up for success by assessing and regulating key sleep-related factors:

- **Schedule:** You cannot teach an overtired baby new skills and an under-tired baby won't sleep
 - Make sure your child's bedtime and wake times (DWT) are consistent and appropriate for their age.
 - Nap times and lengths must be age-appropriate and coincide with DWT & bedtime



- **Environment:** Create a sleep-friendly space that is dark, quiet, and comfortable. Consider:
 - white or pink/brown noise machine
 - to mimic the womb
 - drown out noises in the home
 - mask the sounds of birds and cars around 5am (early wakes!)
 - blackout curtains (for late days and early rises in the summer, but also streetlights, headlights, porch lights, etc. that may shine in and disrupt sleep)
 - Swaddle or sleep sack (if baby is showing signs of rolling): Your little one can't quite keep a blanket on like you and I can, so a swaddle (for babies who cannot roll at all) or a sleep sack (for babies who can) poses as a source of heat regulation. Use a lighter tog and under shirt for summer months, a heavier tog and pajamas in winter months.
- **Nutrition:** Ensure your child is well-fed during the day and before bed to avoid unnecessary overnight hunger but avoid heavy meals or overfeeding right before sleep.
- **Routines:** Establish calming bedtime routines, such as a warm bath, gentle stories, or soft music, to signal that it's time for sleep. When practiced consistently, a predictable routine becomes a safe signal for your baby; a signal that sleep is coming and helps them transition into sleep more easily.

*Keep feeding at the beginning of the bedtime routine, not the end.

*Practice a short version of the bedtime routine before each nap to signal sleep is coming



Choosing a Sleep Training Method

Once all areas surrounding sleep have been assessed and regulated (baby is on a good schedule, not overtired, environment is set up properly, you have a routine you follow consistently before naps and bedtime, and meals are timed and measured appropriately) then you will then have ideal conditions for sleep training.

Every child is unique, and the right sleep training method often depends on your child's specific sleep association. If your baby needs rocking, feeding, or your presence to fall asleep, select a method that gently reduces their reliance on these cues. Popular approaches include gradual withdrawal, controlled comforting, and the "Chair" or "Checkback" methods. Research each option and pick one that feels manageable and appropriate for your family.

Consistency Is Key

Once you've chosen a sleep training method, practice it consistently for at least one week. Consistency helps your child understand new expectations and builds trust in the process. Avoid switching methods too quickly. Give your chosen approach time to work and evaluate its effectiveness after a full week.

Encouragement for Caregivers

Remember, sleep training is a journey, not a race. Some nights will be easier than others, and that's perfectly normal. You are changing everything your little one has ever known about the way they fall asleep. You are eliminating old habits and creating new ones in their place, and the only way to do that is with both *time & repetition*. Stay patient, be gentle with yourself and your child, and reach out for support if you need it. With time and consistency, most children learn to sleep independently within a few weeks, benefiting the whole family for years to come.

