

Sweet Dreams for Baby & You



Having a newborn in your life is a big delight for all members of your family. Happy as you are to have your baby, one of the challenges is to help her to sleep through the night. A side benefit for you when your baby masters this developmental achievement is that you, too, will sleep better.

Babies differ in how long and frequently they sleep. Your newborn may sleep a lot. At six weeks, he begins sleeping longer at night and is awake longer between frequent naps. Generally, he takes three naps a day at three months and goes to sleep earlier in the evening. At six months, you might find your baby taking two naps a day and he may begin to sleep through the night. At fifteen to eighteen months, he takes a longer nap in the afternoon. Sometime after 2 years old, he begins to give up naps and goes to bed earlier in the evening. However, this varies from child to child.

Sleep patterns can vary over time. Your baby might sleep all night for several days in a row and then begin a period of frequent waking. There can be several reasons for her waking, such as sickness, a recent change in routine, family stressors or a change in caregiver. Your baby might sleep through the night for several weeks and then awaken in the middle of the night for a few weeks. This is normal.

The optimal time to help your infant learn to put himself to sleep is between six weeks and six months. Using a bedtime ritual helps your baby feel safe, loved and lovable. For example, bathing your infant, reading a story, nursing or feeding, singing to him or listening to music

in the same way every night creates a routine that helps soothe your baby and readies him for sleep. You can put him in his crib when you think he's sleepy, but not asleep, and then leave the room. If he should cry, you can return and calm him and then leave again. In the first year you may have to return many times to your baby's crib to comfort him. Your baby will learn he can rely on you and also that he can put himself to sleep in a contented manner. Over time, as your baby learns that you will respond to his cries, he will need less input from you to feel comforted.

When babies awaken in the middle of the night, respond in the most non-stimulating, low-key manner possible so she can fall back to sleep; i.e., talking softly, and using only a night light. Pat her softly to soothe her versus picking her up and waking her further. A baby is sometimes a noisy sleeper and can make grunts and complaining sounds rather than outright crying. Listen carefully and wait until her cries seem to be escalating before responding to give your baby a chance to put herself back to sleep.

Sleep-deprived parents of a crying baby often feel very tempted to let their infant cry himself to sleep so that they will be able to get some rest. It is understandable how exhausted parents of a newborn can be. It can be a demanding time. But if you handle it using Smart Love principles, most babies will be happy and fall asleep more easily.

Your newborn cannot perceive that you are tired and need peace and quiet. A baby who is left to cry himself to sleep will be unhappy and feel that his parents are unavailable. Because a baby wants to be just like his parents and copy the way they treat him, he will come to treat himself the way his parents treated him and develop long term needs to be unhappy.

Current research on child development tells us that an infant is born seeking your care and idealizing it. Her deepest desire is to have a close, positive, loving relationship with you.

Some child development theories would suggest that a baby cries to manipulate you; but she does not. She cries to tell you she needs your help and care and wants to feel close to you. When your baby learns you will respond lovingly to her cries and you want her to be comfortable and to feel secure, she will become contented and is more likely to fall sleep. You will have a sense of fulfillment giving her lasting inner happiness and, in addition, you will start sleeping better, too.

Tips for Helping Baby Fall Asleep Happily

- Use a bedtime ritual consistently night after night, such as bath, story, feeding and bed.
- Put your baby in the crib when sleepy but not asleep. If you need to, help your baby settle by singing or humming a soothing song or rubbing your baby's tummy, then leave the room.
- Babies can be noisy sleepers and can make grunting and complaining sounds. If crying escalates, then return to comfort using the least intrusive measures first, rather than immediately reaching to pick up your baby.
- In the middle of the night, respond to your baby in a non-stimulating, low-key and soothing manner.

The Smart Love Approach was developed by Martha Heineman Pieper, Ph.D., and William J. Pieper, M.D., and is described in their book *Smart Love*. The Natalie G. Heineman Smart Love Preschool offers classes for three to six year olds, and parent and child programs for children six weeks to 36 months. Smart Love Family Services provides counseling for children and families based on the Piepers' therapeutic approach, Inner Humanism[®]. Parenting programs include private parent coaching, educational seminars (co-sponsored by the Intrapsychic Humanism Society), parent training and support programs, and publications. © 2015 Smart Love Family Services is an Illinois-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.