



Dr. Jenn

Dr. Jenn Berman

Sleep Training:

Everything You Need to Know to Get a Great Night's Rest for You and Your Family

By Dr. Jenn Berman

One of the first questions we tend to ask new parents, right after "Is it a boy or a girl?" is "are you getting any sleep?" Babies are notorious for keeping their parents up throughout the night.

According to renowned pediatric sleep specialists, Jill Spivack, M.S.W. and Jennifer Waldburger, M.S.W. of Childsleep, sleep training is the act of teaching a child the skill of self-soothing in order to help him learn how to fall asleep or fall back to sleep for both daytime naps and nighttime sleeping. As many parents have discovered, without guidance that is easier said than done.

Preventative Training

During the first four months, a baby's systems are too underdeveloped for sleep training, but further down the line there is a lot parents can do to help their children, and themselves, get a good night sleep.

The two most important sleep training techniques parents need to know are:

1) Distinguishing between daytime and nighttime sleep

2) The nighttime sleep ritual

Earlier on it is important to teach babies the difference between daytime and nighttime sleep. During nighttime feedings Spivack recommends:

- Keeping voices low
- Feeding in semi-darkness
- Behaving as if it is the middle of night

During the daytime she recommends:

- Treating the environment like waking hours
- Allowing louder noises
- Full daylight

• Higher energy

Around eight weeks Spivack and Waldburger recommend beginning a sleep-time ritual. For many parents this includes some combination of bathing, reading a book, singing a song, baby massage, or feeding. It is important that this 15-45 minute ritual be a series of predictable events, which take place in the environment where the child sleeps, and therefore signaling to the baby that it is time to go to sleep.

Sleep Milestones

Newborns typically need 16 hours of sleep per day. The most important sleep lesson to teach your baby at this age is the difference between day and night. The most typical obstacles parents face at this age are that newborns never sleep more than three or four hours at a time and do not stay awake for more than two hours at a time.

Infants, age 3-6 months, typically need 14-15 hours of sleep a day, with 9-10 of those hours at night. According to Spivack and Waldburger, "your baby may start to resist a third nap and begin the transition from three naps to two." The most important sleep task to teach your baby at this stage is predictable bedtimes/nap times and the creation of bedtime rituals. The most typical obstacle parents will face is teaching the baby to fall asleep on his own.

Babies between the ages of 6-9 months have similar sleeping needs and issues as they did in the previous stage. However, at this age children often start to develop separation anxiety and, as a result, may start waking up and having a difficult time falling back to sleep. The excitement of learning new things may make it harder for your 6-9 month

old baby to sleep.

Babies who are 12-18 months old typically need 14 hours of sleep, 11 hours of which are at night. At this point, many children transition from two naps to one. It is not uncommon for bedtime resistance to appear towards the end of this period, due to developmental milestones such as walking.

At 18-24 months toddlers typically need 11-12 hours per night plus one nap each day. At this age children try to assert their independence. This milestone can be difficult on parents. At bedtime, try to give your child choices you are comfortable with, like "Would you like me to read *Goodnight Moon* or *The Little Engine That Could*?" Allowing your child to pick between two choices give him a feeling of control but does not overwhelm him with too many options.

Crying It Out

In the book *Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems*, well known pediatric sleep expert Richard Ferber, M.D. says, "There is no way to treat this problem without having to listen to some crying, but you can keep it to a minimum." Ferber's method, known as "Ferberizing" gradually increases the intervals of crying with interaction between parent and child between increasing periods of "crying it out".

The experts at Childsleep emphasize that your child is crying to communicate "that she's frustrated because she doesn't yet know what to do to sooth herself." While they do not recommend letting a child "cry it out" for extended periods of time, they help parents negotiate the middle ground to help provide loving support while learning the necessary sleep skills.

The Controversy

Not everyone is a fan of sleep training. William Sears, M.D., well-known pediatrician and an advocate of Attachment Parenting claims, "With most of these baby-training regimens you run the risk of becoming desensitized to the cues of your infant, especially when it comes to letting baby cry it out."

But according to Spivack, sleep training is not an ongoing non-response to your child's cries; it is a time-limited non-damaging tool to help parents teach their children to self-sooth. In the end, sleep training is good for the family, since it helps the child learn to sleep and self-soothe, and gives the parents some much needed rest. After all, a well-rested parent is more patient and emotionally available to her child. In addition, Spivack says, "A child who isn't sleeping isn't developing properly physically, cognitively and emotionally. Once they start getting the right amount of sleep they start to thrive."

Dr. Jenn Berman is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in private practice in Los Angeles. In 2005 she will be appearing on the A&E series Family Forensics and on NBC's newest primetime reality show Propose or Die. You can hear her giving advice Monday nights 10 to midnight on Star 98.7 FM. For more information check out www.DoctorJenn.com.