

Toddler Sleep Problems

By Judy Arnall

If you have a child between the ages of one and five years who won't go to bed, won't stay in bed and won't stay asleep, or wakes up too early, you are in good company. According to a National Survey in the US, 70% of parents with children under five years have the same problems. When children are older than one year, there is very little risk of suffocation, so sleeping with parents are easier. Here is some possible sleep arrangements:

- Toddler sleeps in his own bed – parent soothes and gradually leaves in baby steps.
- Toddler sleeps with parents in their bed.
- Toddler sleeps with siblings in their bed.
- Toddler sleeps on living room sofa, while the parents are still up, and then the parents move him when they go to bed.
- Toddler sleeps on the floor on a mattress or airbed next to the parent's bed.
- Toddler starts the night in his own bed and may climb into parent's bed when he needs to, probably in the middle of the night.
- Toddler starts in parent's bed and gets moved to her own bed when asleep and when parents want to go to bed.
- Parents take turns sleeping with the toddler in her own bed every third night so one parent gets a solid night of REM sleep.

Sleep is important. Seventy percent of growth hormone is secreted during sleep. It's still one of those things that is totally under the control of the child. Parents can facilitate sleep, but can't force it.

Some toddlers still sleep with and nurse with Mom during the night. By about age three and a half years, most toddlers are okay with sleeping in their own bed, and their night nursing has become negotiable. They are able to talk with Mom about when and where to nurse. Many Moms want to night wean their toddlers by two years or sooner. Often, holding, cuddles, and a sippy cup of water is enough to help toddlers stop night nursing and go back to sleep. Other Moms have said, "Num-nums have gone to sleep and will wake in the morning to feed you!" Some Moms found it helpful to leave their toddler with Daddy at night to sleep and cuddle with and not feed for a few nights.

If parents understand the reasons why toddlers and preschoolers don't want to go to bed, they can address those needs. Separation anxiety is a huge issue. A recent Today's Parent Survey of 3000 parents revealed that at least 10 percent of families co-sleep. Sleeping with a child for a few years doesn't mean they will never sleep in their own beds any more than using diapers for a few years will prevent a child forever from using the toilet.

There are no studies that show any negative effects from co-sleeping for children aged one and up. Most children sleep alone, in their own beds, in their own rooms, by age 12. By then, they will insist on it!

Wherever a toddler sleeps, be sure to have a bedtime routine: a snack, bath, then pajamas, teeth brushing, and finally a story. Have a brief talk, prayer or snuggle time and kiss them good-night. Children tend to open up and want to talk just before bed. That's why it's great for Dad and Mom to alternate putting children to bed. It's a time for intimate conversations that really builds relationships. It may help to stay with your child while they "let go" and drift off.

Leave them in their own room with a white noise machine, fan, book, or quiet toys in bed. If they get up, attend to their needs. Usually, it's not a drink of water or scary monsters under the bed. It's their need for more parent cuddle time and attention. If they don't settle, bring them downstairs to cuddle and lay on the couch while you watch your adult show or carry on with your adult activities. Keep the focus off them and on to what you want to do. It's your time. They will fall asleep but secure in the fact that their parents are there.

Although there are recommendations for babies under one, there is no co-sleeping safety concerns for children over one. Where your child sleeps is a matter of your family preference, culture, and values and the decision is up to you. No professional should tell you how or where your family sleeps.

Whatever works so no one is crying and everyone is sleeping safely is the right option for your family.

Judy Arnall is a professional international award-winning *Parenting Speaker*, and Trainer, Mom of five children, and author of the best-selling, "***Discipline Without Distress: 135 tools for raising caring, responsible children without time-out, spanking, punishment or bribery***" She specializes in "**Parenting the Digital Generation**" www.professionalparenting.ca (403) 714-6766 jarnall@shaw.ca

Copyright permission granted for "reproduction without permission" of this article in whole or part, if the above credit is included in its entirety.