



## **Solve Your Child's Problem Sleep**

By Judy Arnall

Think of your child as a special flower in the garden. Remember the seeds given at the beginning of the year. You have been given a special seed that needs its own quantity of water, sun, and special soil conditions. Every seed is different and has different needs for amount and type of parent comfort. And that's ok.

What do we know from current research?

### **Temperament**

High need children often do not schedule very well. They do not adapt well to sleep training or separation from parents during the day or night. Consider your child's personality and temperament.

### **Cognitive Ability**

Remember that two year olds still have limited memory and almost no cognitive reasoning skills. Therefore, they have no means to "manipulate" parents. Manipulation requires higher level thinking skills out of the range for two year olds. When you are out of sight, you are pretty well out of memory. They have no concept of if, or when, you are coming back. Their cognitive ability is in the Sensorimotor stage which is limited to "here and now" thinking. So, when you leave them to cry at night, they may be left feeling abandoned, distressed, and insecure. . Often, the child with a limited memory "gives up" hope that comfort is coming, and resorts to self coping

techniques to offset the loss of the parent at night. They are left wondering what happened to Mom who usually comes quickly during the daytime distress, but not the nighttime distress. And they don't understand the difference.

### **Behaviour or Feelings**

Many parents think that Ferberizing "works" in that the child stops crying and goes to sleep. However, we have to question the term "works". The plan works in that it enables parents to not have to get up at night and they can get some sleep. It can be successful for some children in shaping their behaviour, but at a cost to their emotional wellbeing. Recent brain research is telling us that children can have memories from experiences even before language acquisition, which can show up residual problems later in anxiety and stress. We also know that sleep problems are never done once, and often sleep training has to be repeated over and over due to typical upsets in sleep patterns: travel, teething, separation anxiety, guests, illness, vaccinations, developmental milestones, and family changes/stress.

### **Attachment Theory**

The first three years of a child's life are critical years for developing attachment and trust with the parent. If a child is not responded to most of the time with comfort and nurturing when they are sick, upset, or hurt, they can develop attachment problems. This inconsistency can affect how secure and anxious the child is during waking hours. They can become clingy and dependent. It's what experts call an Insecure Attachment, whereby the child receives nurturing at some time and not others.

### **Brain Research**

Recent advances in MRI's (magnetic resonance imaging) done on small children's brains show that the stress hormone, Cortisol, impedes brain cell connections. Therefore, it's imperative for parents not to leave the child in distress for extended periods of time. New research shows that early distress experiences by a pre-verbal child is retained and stored in the Amygdala centre of the brain, which controls emotions, and may contribute to later emotional problems such as anxiousness, low self esteem, and insecurity. (Emotional Intelligence, Dr. Daniel Goleman). It's interesting to note that Dr. Ferber's last book was written in 1985 which is almost 20 years ago and does not reflect current research. In addition, there is no studies present that show a child will have emotional damage or long term bad habits from sleeping with or in close proximity to parents.

### **Reframe the Situation**

Remember that when your child is ten, you are probably not going to think, "I wish I trained my child to sleep better." You might think, "I wish I had more cuddle time with him." If you are meeting your child's needs now for emotional closeness and security, it will enable him to become secure, happy, and independent as he grows older.

The situation can change in a few weeks or months. Your child's developmental stage will be different and things will get better on their own. All children have insecure periods in their lives where they need more closeness and comfort. It's not an either/or meeting of needs. How can you meet your sleep needs and his need for comfort and closeness? See tip sheet on "Help, I'm Tired". Most children that have slipped into the habit of being parented back to sleep can develop self induced sleep habits by the time of their second year molars, around 2.5 years. This could be longer for high need children.

Re-consider co-sleeping. Cultures where children and parents sleep together, have almost no sleep problems in children. In North America, routine co-sleeping was common until the invention of central heating in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and since then, many children do not respond well to night time separation. Babies have not changed in their needs over the last 10,000 years of evolution. Humans are the only mammals that put their children to bed separate from them. You would never see a lion mother put her cub to sleep in a bush 10 feet away from her. Sleep practices are very much influenced by culture.

### **Resources Recommended**

#### **For Family Beds, Co-Sleeping, or Leave things as they are and they might change, method:**

The Baby Book, Dr. Sears  
The Family Bed, Tine Thevenin  
Nighttime Parenting, Dr. Sears  
Attachment Parenting, Katie Alison Granju

#### **For Graduated Sleep Plans, that encourage parents to pick babies up, soothe, and try again:**

The Sleep Book for Tired Parents, Rebecca Huntley  
The No-Cry Sleep Solution, Elizabeth Pantley

#### **Resources Not Recommended (Because of recommendations that contradict best practices derived from updated research)**

#### **For Parent Supported at various intervals, but some crying, sleep plans:**

Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems, Dr. Ferber

#### **For Extinguishment – Let them cry for however long it takes, sleep plans:**

Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child, Dr. Weissbluth

Babywise, Gary Ezzo  
Parenting Power, John Rosemond

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