



Center for Early Education and Development

Questions About Kids

How Can I Get My Baby to Sleep Through the Night?

Parents with babies know the stress and frustration of getting up in the middle of the night, night after night, to quiet a crying baby.

These parents are desperate for advice on what they can do to get their babies to sleep through the night. But there are some kinds of advice that are hard on both the parents and the babies. Dr. Spock used to suggest just letting the baby “cry it out” for several nights. But some babies don’t stop crying, and parents can’t help but try and comfort them.

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New advice tells parents to refrain from rocking or nursing baby to sleep. But parents and babies often enjoy the quiet, close time right before sleep. But you don’t have to give it up. Rock your baby and then put her in bed before she goes to sleep. Babies need to learn to comfort themselves.

How can you make up your own mind about what to do?

First, it’s important to know that babies awaken during the night for many different reasons—hunger, dirty diapers, painful teething, nightmares, illness, or anxiety from unpleasant experiences or strange environments.

Second, it’s important for babies to learn that their parents are people they can count on. So parents need to respond to their babies’ needs, regardless of the time of day. Research shows that when parents respond appropriately to their babies’ cries, the babies are more secure and attached than babies whose

parents are less or inappropriately attentive. The research also tells us that good, secure attachment forms the basis for later independence.

So how can you take care of baby’s needs and minimize your own stress and frustration? Here are a variety of suggestions:

- Try to accept it, and know that “this too shall pass.” Children’s night wakefulness is temporary and a normal part of their growth and development.
- Use a dim nightlight in your child’s room and in any other areas you may go with your child during night wakings. Then you won’t be switching on bright lights that make the child think it’s time to be up and around.
- Be very matter-of-fact and businesslike as you take care of your child’s needs, so that the child knows this isn’t time for playing or waking up. If baby only needs a little comforting, comfort baby by patting his back and talking softly, and leave.

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- Try waiting a few minutes before responding to your baby’s first cry in the night. Sometimes a baby is simply whimpering during sleep or awakens only momentarily, and will go back to sleep.
- Make your own decisions about taking your baby into bed with you. In some cultures, this is a common practice. If it feels comfortable for you, go ahead. or compromise and take the baby into bed with you only after dawn breaks.



- It helps to have baby's room near your own. It saves you a lot of steps. Otherwise, you may want to consider keeping a portable crib in your room for very young babies or for nights when the baby is waking up repeatedly.
- If you're feeding your baby during the night, it may be helpful to change the baby's diaper halfway through. The sucking action often causes baby to wet or soil the diaper. Finish the feeding after diapering and then return baby to bed (baby is usually asleep at this point).
- Keep a warm robe and slippers close by your bed. Put a comfortable rocking chair with an afghan in a cozy corner. If you've got to rock the baby back to sleep, you might as well make it enjoyable.

Questions About Kids is on the Web at:

<http://cehd.umn.edu/ceed>

**University of Minnesota
Center for Early Education and Development
1954 Buford Avenue, Suite 425
St. Paul, Minnesota, 55108**

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