



BABY TALK

Hush Hour

CAN'T GET BABY TO BED? CREATE A SLEEP ROUTINE THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE WITH THESE DO'S AND DON'TS

By *Michele Cohen Marill*

Does getting your baby to drift peacefully to sleep seem like an impossible dream? Think of bedtime and naptime as a routine to help your baby learn, says Kansas City, Mo., pediatrician Natasha Burgert, MD. Babies vary in their sleep needs, and parents have different styles and schedules as well, so “find a pattern that’s comfortable for your family and stick to it,” Burgert says. These expert do’s and don’ts will help all of you find slumberland soon enough.

Do start early with good sleep habits. Newborns are often wakeful at night and sleepy during the day. Help them adjust by dimming lights at night and exposing them to some morning sunlight, says Jodi A. Mindell, PhD, associate director of the Sleep Disorders Center at The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and author of *Sleeping Through the Night: How Infants, Toddlers, and Their Parents Can Get a Good Night’s Sleep*. By 6 to 8 weeks, most babies have a more consistent wake and sleep cycle. By 3 to 6 months, they usually transition to longer naps in the morning and afternoon, she says.

Do give a pacifier. Pacifiers can help a baby fall asleep, and studies show



age-old rituals let your baby know bedtime has arrived. Sticking to a nightly routine also helps parents feel more relaxed, Mindell says.

Don’t let your baby become overtired. You might think keeping your baby awake longer will help him fall asleep, but the opposite is true. “We’ve seen very clearly in our data that babies who go to bed before 9 o’clock get much more sleep and sleep better,” Mindell says.

Don’t be a slave to naptime. Babies thrive on routine, including a regular nap schedule, but sometimes life gets in the way. Don’t worry if your baby falls asleep in the car on the way to an older child’s playdate, and that turns into his nap. Just try to get on track the next day.

Don’t rely on tricks. Drives around the block or cranking up the baby swing don’t allow her to learn how to fall asleep on her own, says Burgert. The advice from the AAP: Put babies to sleep on their backs on a firm mattress in a crib or bassinet, with no stuffed toys, pillows, or loose blankets. These items increase the risk of SIDS.

NIGHT SHIFT

WANT A HAPPY, SLEEPY BABY? THE KEY IS CONSISTENCY, SAYS INFANT-SLEEP EXPERT JODI A. MINDELL, PHD.

Step 1: Keep a regular bedtime every night.

Step 2: Create a bedtime routine. A song, a story, a hug all work well.

Step 3: Put your baby to bed drowsy but awake.

Step 4: Check on your baby if he cries. Don’t pick him up.

Step 5: Repeat step 4 as necessary.

they lower the risk of SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome). But avoid the risk of strangulation and don’t attach the pacifier to your baby with a cord or string. You don’t need to worry if the pacifier falls out or your baby rejects it—in fact, don’t force your baby to take a pacifier if she doesn’t want it, advises the American Academy of Pediatrics. If you are breastfeeding, wait about three or four weeks before using a pacifier, to allow your baby to adjust to nursing.

Do follow a bedtime routine. A bath, gentle cuddling, a lullaby—those

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