

**Attachment Parenting International Position Paper
regarding the new recommendations by the American Academy of Pediatrics**

October 12, 2005

Attachment Parenting International (API), a nonprofit organization headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee, cautions parents to use their best judgment and follow safe-co-sleeping guidelines before banning babies from the family bed.

The new guidelines released October 10, by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) attempt to clarify specific recommendations made previously by the AAP in 2000 to reduce or prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Parents have been continuously warned not to bring their babies into the adult bed and are now being warned not to place their babies to sleep on their side. The guidelines also include a new recommendation of encouraging pacifier use when putting babies to bed, since sucking has shown to reduce the risk of SIDS. These guidelines, although focused on the safety of infant sleep, are unnecessarily narrow, constricting parents to practices that may not be healthy or developmentally appropriate for their infants.

Although API endorses and commends the AAP recommendation encouraging parents to keep infants in close proximity while sleeping, we cannot endorse the AAP's blanket recommendations that parents (1) use a pacifier to help prevent SIDS, and (2) not engage in co-sleeping, as a means of assuring infants' safety while sleeping. These recommendations do not accurately reflect the findings regarding co-sleeping and SIDS, do not acknowledge the importance of breastfeeding and shared sleeping for infants' development and are unnecessarily cautious in regard to the potential risks associated with co-sleeping. Further, the recommendations may inhibit parents from making informed, educated decisions that will have a strong impact on their infants' development, both cognitive and emotional.

First, the AAP recommends pacifier use as a means of encouraging infants to suck, which is associated with lighter stages of sleep. Lighter sleep is protective against the risk of SIDS whereas infants who fall into deep sleep are at risk of not breathing due to the immaturity of their autonomic breathing responses. In response to the recommendation, API notes that breastfeeding also encourages nighttime sucking, providing infants with both sustenance and immunological protection. Further, breastfeeding

provides the important warmth and contact with the caregiver that helps to ease stresses and contributes to a strong bond between caregiver and child.

The use of a pacifier during the transition-to-sleep is problematic, as this has been shown to undermine breastfeeding. Given that pacifier use can inhibit breastfeeding duration and milk production, API does not support the recommendation of the AAP and recommends that breastfeeding mothers be encouraged to breastfeed during the transition-to-sleep and throughout the night—an activity that promotes sucking and provides important nutrients. The practice of co-sleeping further protects infants from the risk of SIDS by the parents' proximity and its association with lighter infant sleep. No attempt was made to investigate whether breastfeeding a child during the transition-to-sleep is also protective against SIDS. The AAP could have made a much more significant contribution, by recommending breastfeeding as a preventive measure for SIDS rather than pacifier use. Given the projected reasons as to why pacifier use is protective, API believes breastfeeding provides similar if not superior experiences to an infant and reduces the incidence of SIDS.

In regard the AAP's recommendation against shared sleep as a means of protecting infants from SIDS, API notes that this caution, particularly as a blanket prohibition, is not supported by the research addressing SIDS risk and co-sleeping. The research has shown that co-sleeping does not increase risk of SIDS if practiced following guidelines that create a safe sleeping environment for the child. Further, some research has clearly identified how co-sleeping may reduce infants' risk of SIDS due to the lighter sleep and synchronized parent-infant sleeping patterns associated with this practice.

Given this importance of shared sleep, API supports co-sleeping when practiced using safe co-sleeping guidelines, as do many other experts. Co-sleeping is one of the best ways to help mothers' get more rest, improve the breastfeeding relationship and enhance mother-child attachment. Parents should make an informed decision about co-sleeping through education, not fear or intimidation.

#

Attachment Parenting International (API) is a **501(c)(3) non-profit member organization**, networking with parents, professionals and like-minded organizations around the world. In addition to providing assistance in forming Attachment Parenting support groups, API functions as a clearinghouse providing educational materials, research information, consultative, referral and speaker services to promote Attachment Parenting concepts.

The mission of Attachment Parenting International (API) is to promote parenting practices that create strong, healthy emotional bonds between children and their parents. These practices nurture and fulfill a child's need for trust, empathy, and affection, providing a lifelong foundation for healthy, enduring relationships. Through education, support, advocacy and research, API seeks to strengthen families and increase awareness of the importance of secure attachment, ultimately helping to reduce or prevent child abuse, behavioral disorders, criminal acts and other serious social problems.

www.attachmentparenting.org

Resources:

For more info on co-sleeping, see “protocol 6” at the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine:

<http://www.bfimed.org/protocols.html>

www.usbreastfeeding.org

<http://www.usbreastfeeding.org/News-and-Events/USBC-SIDS-PR-10-17-2005.pdf>

Chen A, Rogan WJ. Breastfeeding and the Risk of Postneonatal Death in the United States. **Pediatrics** 2004; 113:e435-439URL: <http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/113/5/e435>

McKenna JJ, McDade T. Why babies should never sleep alone: A Review of the co-sleeping controversy in relation to SIDS, bedsharing and breast feeding. **Pediatric Respiratory Reviews** 2005; 6:134-152 (available on line at www.sciencedirect.com) Or just click on this link: [doi:10.1016/j.prrv.2005.03.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.prrv.2005.03.006)

<http://www.lalecheleague.org/NB/NBNovDec95p172.html>

Pacifiers: Yes or No?

<http://www.lalecheleague.org/FAQ/cosleep.html>

Should I Sleep With My Baby?

<http://www.nd.edu/%7Ejmkenn1/lab/faq.html>

Mother-Baby Behavioral Sleep Lab, Dr. James McKenna, Director