

Attachment Parenting International Research Group^(A)
Position Paper Summary. Infant Sleep Safety
What the Research Tells Us

Attachment Parenting International strives to ensure parents have access to the most complete information about how to create safe infant sleep environments, with one of its eight Principles of Parenting exclusively focused on the need to *ensure safe sleep, physically and emotionally*. This position paper summarizes information about infant sleep safety and appropriate, healthy and normal bed sharing practices.

Attachment Parenting is a philosophy based in the practice of nurturing parenting practices that create strong emotional bonds, also known as secure attachment, between the infant and parent(s). This style of parenting encourages responsiveness to the infant or child's emotional needs. *Attachment Parenting International's (API) mission is to promote parenting practices that create these strong, healthy emotional bonds between children and their parents. These methods nurture and fulfill a child's need for trust, empathy, and affection, providing a lifelong foundation for healthy, enduring relationships.* As a result, this strong attachment helps the child develop secure, empathic, peaceful, and enduring relationships.

APIRG Response

Research supports the importance of secure, early parent-infant attachments for children's later positive development. Specifically, research has shown a relation between early attachment and children future positive social interactions and abilities, as well as their academic success. The Attachment Parenting International Research Group (APIRG), a group of researchers working in the area of child development and parenting, supports sleeping arrangements that encourage positive relations between parents and children that provides both emotional support and physical safety for the sleeping infant. In supporting positive infant sleep arrangements, the APIRG presents the following information for consideration.

Shared Sleep Arrangements are the Most Common

Sharing sleeping space with infants and toddlers is the custom, not the exception, for the majority (over 80%) of cultures in the world (1-5).

Waking is Normative for Infants Irrespective of Sleeping Arrangements

The majority of infants (95%) will arouse every 3 to 4 hours during the night in the first month of life, with these arousals requiring parental attention (6). By 8 months of age, infants arouse every 6 to 7 hours with most infants (60-70%) able to self-soothe, i.e., able to fall back to sleep after waking without requiring parental attention.

- Infants who receive parental attention following waking and crying return to sleep more readily than those who receive delayed attention or whose signaling is lack parental response (9).

Developmental Benefit of Attending to Infants during Sleep

Shared sleeping arrangements allow parents to play a synchronous role in infants' request for attention during the sleep process.

- Shared sleeping arrangements provide the nurturant relationship between caregiver and infant that forms the basis of a secure attachment with a parent (6). With this attachment, research shows that these infants will grow into children who are stronger emotionally and more ready to explore new activities (5).
- Shared sleeping arrangements allow parents to attend to infants' signaling which helps the infant learn to regulate emotional responses (11).

Physiological Benefits of Shared Sleep for the Infant

Although there are certain aspects of a sleeping environment that may place an infant at greater risk for suffocation or SIDS, shared sleep arrangements, themselves, do not increase this risk according to research. Rather, shared sleeping arrangements may actually reduce infants' risk in the following manner:

- Shared sleeping arrangements provide an opportunity for more continuous adult monitoring, which may provide parents the opportunity to note infant sleep difficulties and intervene.
- When engaged in shared sleeping arrangements, infants and parents adopt similar breathing patterns, as well as heart rate and body temperature. In this manner, the adults' mature sleeping capabilities may positively influence infants' sleeping mechanisms and help infants during the sleep period.
- When engaged in shared sleeping arrangements, infants sleep more lightly. This is protective against the risk of SIDS;
- Infants who are fed more frequently and whose needs are responded to quickly have been found to be quieter and less fretful during daytime hours (10)
- Infants who sleep in isolation are twice as likely as infants who engage in shared sleeping arrangements to die of SIDS between the ages of 3 and 6 months (10).

Guidelines for a Safe Sleep Environment

Some aspects of a shared sleep routine can increase risk and should be avoided by all parents engaging in this type of sleep routine. These include:

- Parental cigarette smoking which has been associated with higher risks of SIDS events during shared sleeping arrangements,
- Shared sleep in locations where infants could become wedged between the parent and the sleeping surface, for instance when parents and infants share sleeping arrangements on a couch;
- Shared sleeping arrangements if parents have altered their level of consciousness either through the use of alcohol or drugs.

Important considerations for safe infant sleep across locations:

- Always place baby to sleep on their back.
- If sharing sleep, baby should sleep next to mother, rather than between mother and father.

- Take precautions to prevent baby from rolling out of bed. Use a mesh guardrail and be sure the guardrail is flush against the mattress and fill in any crevice with a rolled-up baby blanket or towel.
- Use a large bed with a mattress that fits snugly against the rail or is flush up against a wall, ensuring crevices are filled. Don't use fluffy bedding or cover baby with comforters, etc.
- For crib sleeping, assure crib meets Consumer Product Safety Commission standards and the mattress fits snugly in the crib
- Do not sleep with your baby if you are under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or sleep-inducing over-the-counter medications or if you are overly exhausted from sleep deprivation
- Do not allow baby-sitters or older siblings to sleep with baby.
- Don't fall asleep with baby on a couch, bean bag chair or waterbed.
- Do not let baby sleep unattended on an adult bed.
- Don't overly bundle baby, because they get additional warmth from the mother's body. Overheating can be dangerous to infants. Avoid placing crib near heaters.
- Avoid soft and loose bedding or objects near infants' sleep environment.

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