

Co-Sleeping for You and Your Baby

Is bringing your baby into bed with you the solution to getting a good night's rest?

Shahrazad Warkentin, Contributor

Like 6 Tweet 3 8+1 1



Before deciding whether co-sleeping is the right solution for you and your baby, consider the pros and cons. After one too many sleepless nights spent stumbling in and out of your baby's room, you might want to bring your baby to bed with you so you will feel more human in the morning. But is this a safe choice? Here, three sleep experts -- Kim West, the author of *The Sleep Lady's Good Night, Sleep Tight* (<http://www.amazon.com/Sleep-Ladys-Good-Night-Tight-ebook/dp/B003P8P8I1>), Diana Julian, the founder of sleep practice Big Sky Lullaby (<http://bigskylullaby.com/home/>) and Fern Drillings, (<http://www.ferndrillings.com/>) an experienced nurse and childbirth educator -- weigh in.

- **What Is Co-Sleeping?**

The term "co-sleep" is used to define many types of sleeping arrangements, from babies being in the same room as parents in a separate crib or bassinet to babies and children sharing a bed with parents. The American Academy of Pediatrics (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/128/5/e1341.full>) (AAP) doesn't recommend "bed sharing" where parents and baby sleep in the same bed. Sharing a sleep surface poses a danger of a baby being suffocated or entrapped between a mattress and bed frame, for example. But the AAP does recommend "room sharing," which reduces the risk of sudden infant death syndrome because the baby is in your room, but not in your bed with you.

A related term -- "co-sleeper" -- is a bassinet that lines up against the side of the bed and allows for the baby to be within reach but also offers a separate, safe space for the baby to sleep. "A co-sleeper offers the safest happy medium," says West.

- **What Are the Pros and Cons?**

Co-sleeping offers many benefits for both moms and babies. "It can make breastfeeding easier and it can really help with bonding, since it allows a mother to tune in to the child," says Drillings. It can also help parents get more sleep since it cuts down on time dealing with night wakings by having to go into a separate room. You can feed your baby quickly and get your child right back to sleep.

Quick response time helps establish a secure environment for the baby, asserts West. "Simply listening to your child's cues and responding to them promptly will help establish a solid foundation of trust," she says. This can actually help children foster a sense of independence at an early age.

But sharing a room -- or a bed -- with a baby is not for everyone. For some moms it can mean getting less sleep because of constantly being awakened by a shifting, noisy baby. According to Julian, the practice can also "develop an eat-sleep association for a breastfed baby, which may be hard to transition out of later." Room sharing also affects the intimacy of a couple, notes Drillings. After all, having a baby in

your bedroom makes it tricky to find time to be alone (<https://www.care.com/a/10-ways-parents-can-find-alone-time-1301210800>).

- **How Do You Transition from Co-Sleeping?**

The key to successful co-sleeping is to have a plan, say the experts. The earlier you make the decision to share a room with your baby, the better. That way you can set it up safely and have a plan for when you will transition out of it.

Set up your child early on with the tools he needs to be successful sleeping on his own. "Even children who co-sleep have to learn how to sleep independently," says West. For example, try putting your baby down for a nap in the crib in his own room occasionally, she suggests, then build toward putting him down in the crib awake, but drowsy.

Every family has different needs and deciding when it's time to transition out of room sharing is a personal choice. If your baby is still very young and sleeping in her own crib in your room, it may be as simple as just moving the crib to her room, says Drillings. If your child is older, it may require a little more work. Julian suggests having your child "take ownership" of the process, by picking out her own bedding, for example. The important thing is to make it a positive and happy experience.

Whether you plan to try co-sleeping from the start or resort to it after a few too many sleepless nights, safety -- rather than comfort -- should be the primary concern. Other than that, there is no one-size-fits-all approach, the experts say. Parents need to go with what works best for them and their family.

Shahrzad Warkentin is a freelance writer who covers parenting, health and lifestyle topics and is a stay-at-home mom in Los Angeles.
