

# sleep & settling

This brochure has been developed following a review of the literature relating to parent-child relationships, child development and sleep needs. Because each child is unique this brochure describes a range of options for helping them settle to sleep.

Before starting a settling strategy, it helps to know a little about sleep cycles, sleep needs, routines and signs of tiredness.



## Sleep Cycle

We all have sleep cycles. Adult sleep cycles last approx 90 minutes and babies about 40 minutes. During each sleep cycle we have Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep (our active or light sleep) and NON-REM (our deep sleep). Some babies progress to NON-REM sleep quite quickly while others can take up to 20 minutes. We all wake briefly after our deep sleep and if everything is how we expect it to be, we then go back into the light sleep. We don't even remember waking. Babies can be restless and noisy during the REM sleep cycles but this is normal.

## Tired Signs - Following Your Baby's Cues

Tired signs are communication signals that include both verbal and non-verbal (body language). Your baby will show these signs when she is ready for sleep. One moment she may be playing happily, the next, clenching her fists, grimacing with jerky movements of her arms and legs. If these tired signs are not responded to they can progress to grizzling or crying. Older babies can become upset or whingy, lose concentration and co-ordination, rub their eyes or yawn, become clingy and/or fussy and uncooperative. Knowing that you are close and responding sensitively to your baby's cues can help her feel secure and decrease the amount of crying over a period of time.



## Responding sensitively and appropriately to crying

When a baby cries it is her way of communicating with you. It can be overwhelming when you have difficulty understanding what she wants. Crying can mean many things. It may mean she would like a change in activity, needs a feed, is tired and needs to go to sleep or would like a cuddle. Distress can be indicated by an increase in the intensity, loudness or tone of the cry, whereas tiredness and a need to go to sleep is usually a quieter more grizzly tone that stops and starts.

Getting to know your baby's cues can help you gain a greater understanding of her needs.

*Responding to your baby's needs is not going to 'spoil' her. The more you respond to and meet her needs now, the more secure she will feel and this will help her become more independent as she grows.*

*'When thinking about your baby's sleep needs, look at the whole 24 hours. If your baby seems happy and content most of the time then her sleep needs are probably being met. At Karitane we suggest you follow a routine of 'sleep, feed, play and preparing for sleep'.*



## Sleep Needs

Sleep needs vary from child to child. As babies get older they require less sleep and are able to stay awake for longer periods before tiring:

**Birth to 6 weeks-** average sleep can vary between 12-20 hours per 24 hours for a newborn. Awake time may only be around 1 hour at a time.

**6 weeks to 3 months-** awake time is about 1-1 ½ hours and sleep time is about 1 ½ - 3 hours.

**3 - 6 months-** awake time is about 1 ½ hours - 2½ hours and sleep time is about 1 ½ - 2½ hours.

**6 - 9 months-** awake time is about 2½ - 3 hours with 2 day sleeps of about 1 ½ - 2 hours each.

**9 - 12 months-** awake time is about 3-4 hours with 2 day sleeps of 1-2 hours in the morning and 1 hour in the afternoon.

**Older children-** may continue to need one day sleep until they are about 3-4 years of age.



## Feeding Patterns

It's generally recommended to feed your baby after a sleep during the day. This is because if a baby is regularly fed immediately before a sleep, she may associate feeding with sleep time. When she wakes from a light sleep cycle, she may wake expecting to be fed. As young babies in the first few weeks feed frequently, they will often fall asleep while feeding and can then be placed straight in the cot. If your baby is sleepy during a feed and you are uncertain whether she has had enough, change her nappy and try feeding her again. If she is still not interested she may have had enough.

If your baby is fussing during or after the feed, she may have swallowed some air. You might like to try supporting her in an upright, sitting position on your knee or have her leaning over your shoulder to help her bring up the wind. Gently massaging her tummy in a circular, clockwise motion may also help relieve abdominal discomfort.

The following baby feeding cues may also help you to identify what your baby is trying to tell you:

- **'I want to eat' cues:** crying, mouthing, hands to mouth, sucking movements, clench hands or tight fists over tummy.

- **'I am full' cues:** arching her back, pushing away, falling asleep, relaxed arms and fingers.

- **'I need a break or rest' cues:** crying, regurgitating milk, coughing, looking away, arching back.

## Preparing for Sleep

- Make sure your baby is not hungry, has a clean nappy, is not overdressed and is comfortable.
- Have a 'wind down' time during the day and at night before sleep time when you keep interaction to a minimum.
- A pre-sleep routine can help your baby develop positive sleep patterns. An example of a pre-sleep routine is found below and can be adapted for children of all ages.

- Bath time
- Breastfeed or a drink of milk for an older child
- Clean teeth
- Clean nappy
- Dim lighting
- Talk quietly, gentle song, prayer, cuddle, story time
- This includes letting her know 'it's time to go to bed now'!
- Tuck/wrap depending on age
- Kiss and say goodnight



**Reading** can be a great way to wind down from the day's activities, wonderful for spending some quiet time together and great for literacy skills. Beware of the story-time that goes on, and on, and ON (similarly with requests for drinks, food or toilet etc). Explain to toddlers beforehand that you will read a certain number of books and involve her in deciding which she would like.



**Sleep associations** (things that we associate with going off to sleep) can be helpful or unhelpful. A pre-sleep routine is one example of a helpful sleep association. Dummies may start out as being helpful but can become unhelpful if baby wakes and cries out because she has lost her dummy. Try to use the dummy only when it is needed.

**Wrapping** Many babies like the secure feeling of being wrapped. Babies have a reflex called the "moro reflex" (disappears by 3-4 months). Sudden noises or movements can cause them to throw their arms out and waken themselves. Wrapping your baby in a light cotton fabric can reduce this effect. Wraps are available from Karitane by telephoning (02 9794 2300). Instructions on how to wrap your baby, are available in the Karitane 'Wrapping your Baby' brochure on the Karitane website. Note: By 4- 6 months, when babies begin to roll around the cot

while asleep, they may become entangled in the wrap. For this reason it is recommended to stop using a wrap – instead, tuck her in the cot firmly or use an infant sleeping bag.

### Safe Sleep Environment

SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) and Kids Organisation promotes a smoke free environment for all babies and children. They recommend that babies are placed on the back to sleep with the face uncovered and feet at the foot of the cot. SIDS & Kids also warn against risks associated with bed sharing particularly if parents are affected by alcohol or drugs (they can make you sleep more heavily). Do not place bumpers, pillows, or quilts in the cot and remember to remove all toys before settling. These items can restrict air flow or cover your baby's face and this can lead to suffocation. Be mindful not to overheat your baby with too much bedding. To check current recommendations about these issues visit <http://www.sidsandkids.org> or phone 1300 308 307.



### Looking after YOU

It is important for you to look after yourself while making changes to your child's settling and routines. Think about ways that

will help you stay calm while settling your child such as music, deep breathing, and positive thinking. Sometimes parents can become frustrated when exhausted and things don't seem to be working. If you feel this way, it can help to talk to someone, e.g. partner, family member, Karitane Careline by telephone 1300 CARING (227464).

### Remember to never shake your baby

*It is better to stop the settling and walk away for a short period to calm down. It can help to have someone to support you when you are making changes. Try to organise some support before you start. Share the load with your partner and/or family and accept offers of help. Sometimes we feel we 'should' be able to do it on our own but everyone needs help and support at times. This could be practical support like helping with the washing or cooking, taking the baby for a walk to give you a little time to yourself or it might be having someone to talk to about how you are feeling.*

## Settling Options

Changing your baby's sleep patterns can take time. It is a gradual process for both you and your child to become confident in a different way of settling. Each child and family is unique and has different needs. The following information provides various options for helping your child to settle. Decide on one that suits you and your child. If you decide to start using a new settling option, try to choose a time which works in well with your family and avoid times of change, i.e. moving house, holidays. Don't make any changes if your child is unwell as she will need to know you are close by and will want extra cuddles.

You may use different options according to what's happening at different times. Remember, this is a gradual process. Some days will be better than others.

***Try to be positive – don't be discouraged if the option you have chosen does not seem to work every time.***

## Settling in arms

- Many parents use this method with younger babies from birth and find this works well for them. It can also be helpful at times for an older baby who is distressed. Some babies will fall asleep in their parents' arms with or without gentle rocking.
- There will be times when you will need to wait until your baby is deeply asleep before putting her in the cot.
- If you find that this form of settling is no longer working for you, some other options are described on the following pages.



## Hands on Settling

This method is commonly used with babies 0-6 months of age. It can also be used with an older baby as an alternative strategy to help them calm if they are not responding to another settling method.



- Place your baby in the cot awake on her back.
- If she is calm, settling strategies may not be needed.
- Listen to and observe your baby's cues and respond by reassuring her. Here are some suggestions you might like to try.

- Gentle 'ssshhh' sounds
- Talk quietly, using comforting tones
- Pat gently and rhythmically, e.g. thigh area, shoulder area, abdomen
- Apply gentle contact on your baby's body, leg or arm
- Gently and slowly rock your baby's body side to side
- Stroke gently and rhythmically, e.g. forehead or head, arm, leg
- Gently rock the cot/bassinette, after making sure your baby is securely tucked in and it is safe to do so.

*Remember babies are individuals and will respond differently.*

- Stay with your baby until she is calm or asleep.
- As you become more confident with 'hands on settling' you could start to move away from the cot/bassinette before she falls asleep in order to give her a chance to settle herself when she is calm. In the early days, you may decide to stay in the room if you prefer.
- If your baby is becoming distressed, pick her up and give some comfort and reassurance. Stay near the cot and place her back once she is calm.
- Gradually reduce the settling as your baby calms e.g., pat slower and softer. If your baby is not settling, you can try one of the alternatives listed on the back page.



## Comfort Settling

Some older babies might become more distressed if you are trying 'hands-on' settling when they are used to you picking them up out of the cot to settle them. If this is the case, Comfort Settling is an option to help babies over 6 months of age become used to sleeping in a cot. This option provides babies with reassurance and support while also providing some 'space' to discover their own way of going off to sleep.



• When you notice your baby's tired signs, place her in the cot while still awake and move away if she is not distressed.

• If she shows any signs of distress, comfort her for short periods. Comforting might include:

- Gentle patting, rocking or stroking. Sometimes just having you in the room with her is all the comfort she may require.
- Gentle 'ssshhh' sounds
- Talk soothingly and quietly. You might use phrases such as "time to lie down, time for sleep, good girl, off to sleep now", while laying her back down and then leaving the room or moving away.

- Leave the room for a short period to give her a chance to settle herself. Don't leave the room for long periods- just a short period of time (perhaps just a few seconds in the early stages) is sufficient to give her an opportunity to discover her preferred way of settling and being reassured that you are not far away.
- At all times listen to the nature of her cry when deciding on returning to the room. If she is just grizzling or having more frequent pauses between crying, wait to see whether she is starting to go to sleep.
- Repeat these steps and gradually reduce the settling as she calms.
- If you want to pick her up for a cuddle, go ahead. Try to keep this fairly short though and then place her back in the cot to go to sleep when she is calm.
- Try to be consistent with the settling. If you feel at any time that you or your baby have had enough or she remains distressed and shows no signs of calming – stop and use an alternate strategy (see back page) and then try again at the next sleep time.

## Parental Presence

This option has been found to be helpful in settling children 6-24 months of age and involves the parent staying in the room and providing the minimal amount of reassurance necessary to give your baby a chance to learn to fall asleep by herself. Note that you will need to place some comfortable bedding in your baby's room for yourself in order to use this strategy effectively. While the room should be darkened, it is also important that there is enough light for your baby to be able to see you (e.g., using a night-light).

- Lay down in view of your baby and pretend to be asleep.
- If she wakes, let her know you are still in the room with a quick cough or by rolling over.
- If your baby needs comforting use the minimal amount of reassurance necessary, with the aim of keeping her in the cot and then lie down and pretend to be asleep again.

- Wait until she is asleep before leaving the room during the day and sleep in the same room as her during the night for approximately the 1st week.
- Try to be consistent. If you feel at any time that you or your baby have had enough or she remains distressed and shows no signs of calming – stop and use an alternate strategy (see back page) and then try again at the next sleep time.
- Try to persist for at least 1 week. Once your baby has 3 consecutive nights of relatively uninterrupted sleep you can begin to leave the room before she is asleep and sleep in your own bedroom at night.

- If your baby isn't settling, you may like to return to using the parental presence strategies until your baby sleeps well for another three consecutive nights. If this still hasn't improved your baby's sleep, try another settling technique if needed.
- It is recommended that you use Parental Presence up to a maximum of 4 weeks.





### Self-Settling

This option can be useful for helping older babies (from around 12 months) to settle in a cot. It involves comforting your baby for a short period and then leaving the room to give her opportunity to discover her preferred way of settling.

- After your pre-sleep routine, leave the room to give her the opportunity to self-settle.
- Listen to your baby and respond as needed by comforting her while she is in the cot for a brief period and giving quiet verbal reassurance.
- Continue to reassure her intermittently and leave the room for slightly longer periods although this should not exceed more than a few minutes if she is unsettled and crying - just a short period of time (perhaps just a minute in the early stages) is sufficient to give her an opportunity to discover her preferred way of settling and being reassured that you are not far away.

- She may protest loudly when you first leave the room and if this does not settle or if you feel you need to respond, do so by returning briefly to reassure and comfort her.
- Try to be consistent with the settling. If you feel at any time that you or your baby have had enough or she remains distressed and shows no signs of calming – stop and use an alternate strategy (see back page) and then try again at the next sleep time.

### Gradual Withdrawal

This option initially allows your child to fall asleep with the parent in close proximity, particularly when they have recently made the move from a cot to a bed. This can be a lengthy process as the child gradually becomes more confident and able to settle on her own.

- The aim is to support your child to stay in the bed. If this is the 1st time in a bed try to involve her in making this a positive event, e.g. choosing bed linen etc and prepare her throughout the day, talking to her about what to expect.

- Let her know that if she stays in the bed, you will stay with her until she falls asleep.
- You may like to try a rewards system to help encourage positive behaviour at bedtime, e.g. stickers or telling her if she stays in bed you will take her to the park tomorrow. Remember: if you make a promise be sure to keep it.
- Choose an appropriate time for bed, making sure she does not become overtired.
- The pre-sleep routine (p. 4) is very important in helping to develop positive sleep behaviours.
- She may find it easier to settle with a familiar object to cuddle or the presence of a night-light.
- Put her in bed and start by sitting beside or on the bed. She may like some physical contact initially, e.g. holding hands.
- Allow her to settle by keeping talking to a minimum.
- Avoid becoming engaged with ongoing requests which she may use to delay bedtime e.g. "I need a drink", "I want something to eat".

Over time you will gradually increase the physical distance between you and your child as she gains the confidence to fall asleep unaided, e.g. moving the chair slightly further away from the end of the bed, then chair beside the bed, middle of the room, by the doorway and then outside the room. Once outside the room, reassure her that you are nearby. Keep the chair in the one position for that particular settling time. Constantly moving in and out of the room can undermine the child's trust. Only move the chair further away when you and your child are ready. The timeframe to increase your distance from the bed will be gradual and will vary with individual families (e.g. over several days or several weeks).

- If she leaves the bed, walk her back to bed, telling her it's time for bed and resettle. Reassure her that if she stays in bed, you will remain until she has fallen asleep (e.g. end of bed, on a chair in the room). If she will not remain in her bed, leave the room very briefly and then return again.
- During the day, if your child does not actually go to sleep, don't be discouraged. Each attempt to settle her in bed is a valuable learning experience.



## ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES FOR ALL AGES

When a child is learning a new way of settling, it is common for them to have some unsettled periods. There may be occasions when you will need to use an alternative way to soothe her, e.g. if she is not responding or you feel that she and/or you have had enough for the time being and need to try something different.

If this happens, pick your child up and try one of the alternatives listed below or something that soothes your child that you are comfortable with.

- Soothe her with a cuddle while talking to her in a soft, soothing, repetitive voice. Gentle swaying movements can help you and your baby relax.
- She might need a feed.

- Take her for a walk in the pram. If she is distressed while in the pram respond to her with a cuddle.
- Carry her in a pouch (baby carrier): See the Choice website for considerations when buying a pouch – [www.choice.com.au](http://www.choice.com.au)
- Give her a massage and / or a relaxation bath if she finds this relaxing.
- Change her nappy if needed.
- Pat, stroke her head or rock her off to sleep.

***Don't be discouraged! Try again next sleep time and her settling will gradually improve.***

***Responding to your baby's needs will not spoil her, it will help her feel more secure.***

Reviewed May 2008. References available on request.

### **For further information and support please consult:**

- Child & Family Health Nurse
- General Practitioner
- Karitane Careline on 1300 CARING (1300 227 464)

Web: [www.karitane.com.au](http://www.karitane.com.au)

E-mail: [Karitane.online@sswahs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Karitane.online@sswahs.nsw.gov.au)

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