



## TEA-BREAK GUIDE



All parents and carers need evidence-based information about safer sleep for their babies. We now know that shock messages don't work and can actually lead to increased risk. The emphasis has moved towards discussing safer sleeping in partnership with parents and carers. These are not easy conversations to have, and practitioners need to draw on their communication skills to ensure families have the opportunity to discuss their individual circumstances and risk factors.

### Clear Messages:

Although Sudden Infant Death (SIDS) is now rare, approximately 200 babies still die every year. Half of these babies die in their cot or Moses basket, and half die while co-sleeping, but 90% of these co-sleeping babies die in hazardous conditions and their deaths are largely preventable. The risk of babies dying from SIDS would be reduced further if families were given clear and consistent messages from professionals about safe sleep.

All practitioners working with families should feel confident to share these messages, viewing it as an ongoing conversation explored at each contact.

Asking parents where and how babies sleep should be a routine enquiry by all practitioners who have contact with families where there is a baby under 1 year. Practitioners who visit the home should see where the baby sleeps both day and night, often asking the question '*where did baby sleep last night?*' elicits a more specific and truthful answer from parents.

The impact of drugs and alcohol on decision-making should be discussed with parents, there should always be a sober caregiver to care for children and to follow safer sleep guidance.

An understanding that it is normal for babies (especially in the first year of life) to wake and need comfort and nutrition frequently throughout the day **and night** can help parents to cope. Encouraging them to respond to their baby's cues and develop a close and loving relationship supports with the transition to parenthood

### Key Messages

- Always place your baby on their back to sleep, with their feet at the foot of the cot so they can't wriggle down under the blankets
- Use blankets which are firmly tucked in, no higher than the baby's shoulders. Or use a baby sleeping bag (but check that your baby meets the minimum weight for safe use.)
- Ensure your baby has a clear cot or Moses basket – free from toys, pillows, or bumpers
- Baby should sleep in the same room as you for the first six months
- Use a firm, flat, waterproof mattress that is clean and in good condition. Soft surfaces like pods, nests, bouncy chairs are unsafe.
- Keep your baby smoke-free during pregnancy and after birth. For help and advice speak to your midwife, GP, or e-mail [smokefree@nhft.nhs.uk](mailto:smokefree@nhft.nhs.uk)
- Breastfeed, if you can. For support speak to your midwife, health visitor or infant feeding team.
- Never sleep on a sofa or in an armchair with your baby.
- Don't cover your baby's face or head while sleeping or use loose bedding.
- Do not bed-share with your baby if you smoke, drink alcohol, take any illicit drugs or medication that may make you drowsy, or if your baby was born prematurely or was of low birth weight.
- Avoid letting your baby get too hot. A room temperature of 16-20°C is ideal. Feel your baby's chest or back of their neck to check if they are warm (hands and feet will always be cooler which is normal)

## Safer Bedsharing

On any one night, it is estimated that 22% of babies will bed-share – 149,000 babies each night. Around 40% of parents who have slept with their babies have done so in hazardous situations such as on a sofa, having drunk alcohol, or as a smoker.

Parents often report that they feel they cannot be honest about co-sleeping with their baby so don't receive information on how to do so more safely. It is not enough to tell parents not to bedshare – most parents will doze off with their baby at some point so all parents should be advised on how to prepare for unplanned co-sleeping

All parents should be involved in a non-judgemental conversation about their family's risk factors (this will be individual to each family). They should be advised not to bedshare if they have these risk factors, but also need to be given information to plan for safer bedsharing in case they choose to do this. Safer bedsharing is always safer than falling asleep on a sofa or armchair with baby.

Safer Bed-Sharing Advice:

- Continue to follow all general safe sleep guidance including placing baby on their back and make sure they do not get too hot (they may not need any covers at all)
- Ensure baby cannot get trapped between the mattress and the wall, wedged, or fall out of bed
- Keep pillows and duvets well away from baby
- Keep pets and other children out of the bed
- Create a clear space on one side of the bed for baby – see image on the right:

It is dangerous to bedshare if:

- Your baby was born prematurely (before 37 weeks of pregnancy)
- Was born weighing less than 2.5kg or 5 lbs 7 oz
- You or anyone in the bed smokes
- You or anyone in the bed has recently drunk any alcohol

## Useful reading

[Safer-Sleep-Guidance.pdf](#)

[How to reduce the risk of SIDS for your baby - The Lullaby Trust](#)

[Breastfeeding resources - Baby Friendly Initiative \(unicef.org.uk\)](#)

[BASIS – Baby Sleep Information Source \(basisonline.org.uk\)](#)

<https://www.lullabytrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/DIGITAL-Top-Ten-Tips-For-HP-Little-Lullaby.pdf>

<https://www.lullabytrust.org.uk/new-survey-shows-40-of-parents-are-not-co-sleeping-safely/>

<https://www.lullabytrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Safer-sleep-for-babies-a-guide-for-parents-web.pdf>

