



Safe Sleep in Baby's First Year

In most parts of the world, and for most of human history, babies and young children have slept together with others. Most often, babies sleep with their mothers.

People who sleep together share more than just a mattress. They share movements, smells, touches, sounds.¹

Sleeping together helps infants develop a healthy attitude towards sleep. It gives them security and strength. Children who have to sleep alone when they don't want to, often grow up feeling that sleep is something unpleasant, a time of fear and separation.²

The American sleep researcher James McKenna is a vehement advocate of mother and child sleeping together. He has researched it extensively, so reliable results are available. Women who co-sleep with their children show a higher resonance in the distribution of waking phases and the change between different sleep stages - the sleep phases of mother and child adapt to each other. It's also interesting to note that co-sleeping reduces the proportion of deep sleep, and instead more time is spent in REM sleep. Mothers who co-sleep with their infants are therefore less exhausted than mothers who get up at night to breastfeed/tend to their infants.³

There's also consensus among sleep researchers that the mother acts as an internal clock for the infant's sleep-wake rhythm. Other bodily functions like breathing, heartbeat, hormone secretion (cortisol) also show a high degree of correspondence between mother and child.

As different as human cultures are around the globe, they all agree on one thing: infants belong near their parents at night. The only exception is modern Western society. Here, parents often think that their children won't become independent. Some paediatricians also confirm this and believe that co-sleeping can even be dangerous and pose a risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

When co-sleeping, the same safety recommendations should be followed as for "Safe Sleep in Baby's First Year" (see www.holisticchildsleep.com).⁴

In addition, there are a few points to consider regarding the bed:



The Safe Family Bed:

- The prerequisite for the family bed is that no one who sleeps in it smokes, and/or is under the influence of drugs, alcohol or consciousness impairing medication.⁵
- Any double bed can become a family bed, unless it is a waterbed.
- Couches, sofas, recliners, improvised beds, etc. are NOT suitable as safe family beds.
- It must be ensured that the baby can't fall out. There shouldn't be any gaps in the bed that the baby could slip into.
- The baby may wear less at night than when sleeping alone, because it's warmer together in the family bed at night.
- Babies sleep most safely in the family bed next to their nursing mother. But according to paediatrician Renz-Polster, parents who give their child a bottle at night can also share their bed with their child.⁶ Babies under 1 year old shouldn't sleep directly next to a sibling, instead it's better for them to sleep next to an adult. Pets should also not share a bed with a baby.
- Falling asleep on a parent's body is fine. However, before the parent falls asleep they should lay the baby down, as this position is not safe in the first year.
- To prevent the baby from slipping under a blanket, it's recommended that each adult has their own duvet and the baby lies next to them in a sleeping bag or pyjamas, without a blanket or pillow.
- Before a baby can turn onto their stomach, if possible they should always lie on their back to sleep.
- Most families don't have enough space in the family bed, so making it bigger can be a great can make a big difference to the quality of sleep.
- There should be no cords, ribbons, chains, cables, etc. within reach of the infant. Padding for cot rails or cuddly toys is also not recommended.

References:

<https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/138/5/e20162938/60309/SIDS-and-Other-Sleep-Related-Infant-Deaths-Updated>

¹ Schmidt, Nicola: *artgerecht, Das andere Baby-Buch*, München, Kösel, 2015

² Sears, William: *Nighttime Parenting*, La Leche League, 1999

³ <https://cosleeping.nd.edu>

⁴ <https://www.holisticchildsleepp.com>

⁵ <https://www.paediatricschweiz.ch/bedsharing-und-plotzlicher-kindstod-aktuelle-empfehlungen/>

⁶ Renz-Polster, Herbert/Imlau, Nora: *Schlaf gut, Baby!* München, GU Verlag, 2018