

## Sleeping with your baby (Part I)



Night-time arrives and it's time to put months-old baby down to sleep. The fearful ritual begins once again. Baby cries for its mum, mum studiously ignores the desire to comfort baby, so baby screams, and screams and screams! After 30 minutes of this the obedient mum enters the room - not to pick her baby up – but to pat her and walk out again, only to repeat the heart wrenching cycle. The same thing happens again the next night, only this time the mum must wait 5 minutes longer than the previous night before the designated patting ritual is performed. Again, the baby must not be picked up and comforted by mum under any circumstances. This process goes on indefinitely until such time as the baby can fall asleep all alone and sleep unbroken and unfed throughout the night.

This process is often referred to as “Ferberizing” a child, a name that derives from the self proclaimed American infant sleep “expert” Richard Ferber. Many parents find Ferber’s boot camp for babies agonizing, but they persist because they have been persuaded it is both harmless and in the best interests of the baby and the wider family. Ferber depicts the method as the child’s natural progression toward “night-time self reliance.” If a mum should cave in and pick up her baby, hold her to her chest, nurse her and offer comfort, let alone decide to allow her baby to sleep in the parental bed, she is deemed a failure and is roundly castigated by medical professionals who “know best what baby needs”. They too have believed the Ferber theory and fallen victim to the ill considered report of the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) of September 1999 which has succeeded, in the face of powerful evidence to the contrary, to convince all and sundry that it is a dangerous practice to sleep with ones baby.

In the September/October 2002 issue of *Mothering*, the scientific evidence in relation to this issue is presented. This evidence compellingly concludes that not only is it safe for you to sleep with your baby, it is actually unsafe not to! Scientific research into bed sharing or co-sleeping as it is often called, has clearly demonstrated that the majority of parents sleep safely with their babies at some time during the night, and that a baby is safest when sleeping in close proximity to mum.

Unfortunately the CPSC mantra has been so successful in infiltrating the thought process and belief system of the medical professionals who attend to the needs of mothers and children that it has become simply an accepted fact that babies should not sleep in their mothers beds. Even hospitals around the world are beginning to change their policies in relation to bed sharing practices, believing they have the whole story from the CPSC report, when nothing could be further from the truth.

In the meantime frustrated and tired mothers, whose crying unsettled babies would settle easily into prolonged night-time sleep patterns were they allowed to bed share, nurse on demand and be in close proximity to the warmth and familiar smell of their mum, go on agonizing over the “don’t cuddle” ritual and spiral downward into chronic sleep deprivation. The answer? Surrender to the natural urge to take your baby to bed with you, hold them close, nurse on demand and enjoy the wonder of natural mothering.

More in the next issue of the Kiro for Kids newsletter, including a report on the research into sleep dysfunction conducted by Kiro Kids and how to ensure that sleeping with your baby is a safe and joyous experience.

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