

Chapter 1

Taking Charge of Your Dream Team

In This Chapter

- ▶ Accepting the rules of the first few months
 - ▶ Getting it straight: Trauma versus disappointment, wants versus needs
 - ▶ Plotting a new, improved course of action
 - ▶ Trading up: From guilt to self-confidence
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You're a grownup, smart and experienced. And you have lots of skills — you can scramble an egg, ride a bicycle, and balance a checkbook. Your child, in contrast, is a little person. He's smart too, but he really doesn't know much yet.

So you're probably wondering, "Why does *he* keep winning the bedtime battles?"

The answer is simple: Right now, your child is deciding when it's sleepytime and when it isn't. But the solution is also simple: You need to change the rules.

Luckily, you can accomplish this mission in a loving way that strengthens the bond between you and your sweetie. In fact, when you help him sleep on his own, you lay the groundwork for a strong, happy relationship. In this chapter, we tell you when and how to prepare for this big step — and, most importantly, why it's the right one for both you and your child.

In the Beginning . . . Baby's in Charge

The whole world is new to your baby, but she enters it fully equipped for those all-important basics: eating, sleeping, peeing, and pooping. The catch, of course, is that she does these on her

schedule, not yours! That's okay when it's peeing and pooping — but those non-stop wake-up calls in the middle of the night can leave you bleary-eyed and fuzzy-brained.

However, when your newborn hollers every few hours, she's doing just what she's supposed to do. In the early weeks, your baby simply isn't ready to sleep through the night. (Yes, we know, a few tots do — but they're the exception, not the rule.)

Your newborn needs you to wait on her each time she wakes up because she's growing like a weed and has to eat every few hours to meet her calorie demands (see Chapter 4). Besides, her sleep cycles are too immature for her to make it through the night. In Chapter 2, we explain why sleep is more than just closing your eyes and why your baby needs to grow into mature sleep patterns before she can conk out for more than a few hours.

When your little angel gets past those calorie and sleep-pattern hurdles, she's ready for an all-night snooze. Almost all children hit this mark between 4 and 6 months of age. Of course, each tot's unique, and some reach this point a few weeks after birth — but the closer she gets to 4 months of age, the more certain you can be that your infant can sleep all night without interruption. (For ways to make her even *more* ready, see Chapter 5.) But at that point, another question arises: Are *you* ready?

Conquering Your Fears about Taking the Big Step

Even though you can now pick your moment for getting your sweetie to doze through the night, one qualm may hold you back — the fear that somehow you'll emotionally damage your little love-bug by being firm with him.

But the fact that you're reading this book means you want to handle your tyke's sleep problems in a kind and nurturing way. So here's good news: Helping your babe figure out how to fall asleep on his own doesn't hurt him a bit. In fact, you'll do him — and you — a world of good.

The big misunderstanding: Trauma versus disappointment

The first secret to raising kids is knowing the huge difference between *trauma* and *disappointment*. Yes, you'll disappoint your

sweetie when you stop letting him call the shots at bedtime — but no, he won't be the least bit traumatized. In fact, he'll take a giant step toward becoming a well-adjusted little person.

So what's the big difference between trauma and disappointment? Check out the following explanations:

- ✓ A *trauma* is a terrible event that shakes a child to the core, challenges his belief that the world is a safe place, and causes long-term emotional distress — for instance, the death of someone he loves or abandonment by the people he trusts. Traumas occur when serious needs are denied, and they cause grave harm.
- ✓ *Disappointments*, on the other hand, are tiny clouds that pass, causing no harm at all. They're simply unanswered desires that occur when people create expectations that can't be fulfilled — and they're the stuff of daily life.



Fortunately, traumas happen far less often than disappointments. Of course, everyone wants to skate through life free of both traumas *and* disappointments — and caring parents certainly strive to keep both to a minimum. But it's important not to mistake minor disappointments for serious traumas because this mistake can hinder both you and your child. What's more, it's a common trap for parents.

Why is it so easy to make this mistake? To get an idea, picture an 8-month-old crying up a storm at 2 a.m. Because his parents weaned him from the nighttime bottle two months ago, they know he isn't hungry. They're also sure he isn't sick, in pain, or simply stuck. In reality, he's just trying to wake up Mommy and Daddy, get them out of bed, and enjoy a little snuggle. But even after they make sure nothing's really wrong (see the yellow tear-out card at the front of this book), his parents *believe* they're hearing the primal scream of a child terrified by the impending trauma of parental abandonment. It's a classic case of mistaken identity — the disappointed infant masquerading as a broken-hearted child in a life crisis.

Why does this confusion matter? Because if you think your infant is about to suffer irreparable harm, your only option is to give in. In fact, when you let this mistaken idea direct your actions, you're unable to offer your child any guidance — now or later — for fear that lifelong damage may ensue. And this fear can leave you paralyzed by doubt and worry, making any effective course of action impossible and inevitably getting in the way of your tot's growth and development.



What's more, the impossible task of preventing all disappointments can leave you exhausted and resentful. You're much smarter to show your little huggy-bear that frustrations come with all new life skills — from tying his shoes, to playing with friends, to managing a Fortune-500 company — and sleeping on a schedule is one of the very first.

So as you get ready to turn over a new leaf in your household, brace yourself for a very interesting turn of events as you put your tot in charge of his own sleep. If you hear complaints — and we're pretty sure you will! — see them for what they are: reactions to a minor disappointment, not a major trauma. Remember, too, that this is an exciting moment. When you tell your sweetie in words and actions that he's ready to sleep through the night, you're demonstrating your confidence in his ability to master this first big-kid skill.

Your biggest challenge: Distinguishing between wants and needs

Watching your sweetie's face scrunch up and hearing her wail when she doesn't get what she wants can be tough, we know. But you can expect this reaction more than once when you implement your sleep strategy.



However, the key to your child's sleep — and every other aspect of her life — is remembering that *wants* aren't *needs*. As a parent, you make sure your child has everything she *needs*, but that doesn't mean you give her everything she *wants*.

For the first few months of your baby's life, you can easily distinguish her wants from her needs — because she needs you for everything! Somewhere around that 4- to 6-month mark, however, she doesn't need you as much as you think.

With each passing month, your little one is able to do more, understand more, and be more independent. However, she's also accustomed to being with you — her 24-hour on-call buddy — and she's not going to give up that arrangement easily.



Like a kid in a candy store, your tot has trouble knowing the difference between what she wants from you and what she needs from you. And as a loving, nurturing, and very tired parent, you don't always know the difference either. But if you can make this distinction between wants and needs *and* make it early in the game, your life and your child's can be happier.

Of course, older kids' wants and needs are easier to sort out than babies' and toddlers'. (In fact, we outline different sleep strategies for kids at different ages and stages in Part II of this book because what works for an 8-month-old can be very different from what works for a 3-year-old.) But making the distinction is key to your sleep strategy. To help you tell the difference, here's a quick run-down of your little one's needs versus her wants.

Your baby *needs* the following from you:

- ✓ Plenty of food — on demand at first, and at regular intervals later on
- ✓ Love, cuddles, rocking, gentle touching, and the sound of your voice
- ✓ Safety and security
- ✓ Interaction that develops her language and stimulates her development
- ✓ Consistent caregivers to help her develop trust and attachment
- ✓ Proper medical care to keep her happy and healthy
- ✓ Lots of diaper changes!

In contrast, here's what your baby or toddler *wants* from you:

- ✓ **You, you, you**, every minute of every day and — as the old Beatles' song goes — “eight days a week.”
- ✓ **Lots of inappropriate stuff** — like your permission to stick her finger in a light socket or put the cat in the toilet — especially in those first months of toddlerhood, when she discovers the amazing wonders of the world around her (more on this stage in Chapter 6).
- ✓ **Power**
Power is simply the ability to change what someone else does, and politicians and movie villains aren't the only power-mad people. The average tot is quite able — and very willing — to use her power when she desires control over Mommy or Daddy.
- ✓ **Everything else her little heart desires — right now!**



Do you see a lot of overlap between the preceding wants and needs lists? Nope. Yet loving parents often worry so much about upsetting their children that they give into every demand, no matter how unreasonable. As a result, they keep their little ones from finding the boundaries all children seek: the line where their parents say “No” *and* the rules their parents really care about.

Understanding the need for limits

Of course, your child can get what he wants — he just can't get what he wants *every time*, and some of his demands will simply be unreasonable. When he's 6 years old, for instance, he'll want the fad toy that costs a fortune and breaks on the first day. At 10, he'll beg for junk food every day. And when he's 16, he'll want you to buy him a brand-new sports car you can't afford.

You know parents who give in to all of their kids' demands, whether they're sensible wishes or not. These kids scream for candy in the grocery store and have ear-splitting tantrums on the playground when they don't win every game. They stay up till 2 a.m. watching television and then struggle through school half-asleep the next day. Somewhere along the line, their parents find out the hard way that children actually crave and need limits. A kid whose every wish is granted keeps pushing and expanding his demands, always seeking the line his parents never draw.



When you draw that line, you give your child a gift that's second only to love: guidance. And coupled with your love, this guidance tells him you'll keep him safe and sound. A child whose Mom and Dad set loving limits learns early to have reasonable expectations and be very happy when they're met.

Changing Your Tot's Expectations — and Yours

If you're the Queen of England, you have pretty high expectations. Your tiara needs to sparkle, your palaces need to be spotless, and high tea had better include those little cucumber sandwiches.

If you're a regular person, however, you're probably happy if your partner cooks breakfast or your dog fetches the paper. And if the next-door neighbor drops off a batch of home-made cookies, you're in heaven.

What's our point? That people base much of their happiness on what they expect from life. You don't expect dozens of servants to wait on you hand-and-foot, so you're perfectly happy without them. The queen, however, would be mighty unhappy if she had to scrub your toilet and water your ficus.

Babies and toddlers, just like grownups, are happy when life meets their expectations. But right now, that's a problem for you because

your child expects you to appear on demand at any hour of the night. As a result, he'll be as mad as a queen with a tarnished tiara if you don't show your face on schedule.



To tweak his royal stance, you need to change his expectation — but it isn't likely to change until you take the first step, by changing *yours*.

Refocusing your thoughts

Before your munchkin can change her expectations, you need to change two of your own. First, expect her to take charge of the issue at hand: her. Second, expect her to put up a fuss when you ask her to do this. Be prepared to react (or *not*, as the case may be) to this resistance.

You can help change your expectations by keeping these facts in mind:

- ✔ **You and your tot have different jobs.** Your sweetie's job is to demand lots of stuff because that's how she figures out what's reasonable and what isn't. Your job, in turn, is to set limits so she can figure out the rules of life.

For instance, if she says, "I want an elephant," your job *isn't* to rush out and get her one. Your job *is* to explain why she's not getting one.
- ✔ **To maintain a healthy lifestyle, both you and your child need regular, uninterrupted sleep.** A good night's sleep is important for your whole household, and your tot will still love you every bit as much when you stop popping out of bed at all hours to entertain her. When you recognize these truths, you're halfway down the road to a solid sleep solution. At this point you're ready to gently and lovingly teach your child a brand-new expectation: I'm not going to get lots of attention if I squawk when I wake up, so I'll just happily go back to sleep on my own. Period.
- ✔ **Giving in has a big downside.** When you cave in and satisfy an unreasonable demand, your child's first thought is something like, "Wow! I got Mommy and Daddy to give me a bottle when I didn't need it!" But her next thought is something like, "Hmm . . . now, how do I get a bottle *twice* a night? How far can I push my demands before they draw the line?" And if you never set reasonable limits, she's likely to start worrying, "Uh-oh — how can I feel safe if Mommy and Daddy don't really respond to my pushing the limits?"

Strengthening your hand at the negotiating table

Many families have at least one tot who simply refuses to sleep through the night. This is the tyke who figures out how to keep the rest of the family members popping up like prairie dogs all night long for months, even years.

Often, the mommies and daddies in these families are skilled negotiators — lawyers, sales people, or even CEOs who negotiate for a living. Yet every night, these parents get outmaneuvered by a tiny being. How is this possible?

The answer is that even very young babies negotiate — and often they drive hard bargains! Most people think of negotiation as a tough adults-only event, like union bosses sitting at a table with corporate lawyers or company administrators discussing big mergers. But negotiation is simply a situation in which two people want different outcomes; they interact to see how it'll turn out.

In your case, negotiation occurs whenever your baby wants something different than you do at bedtime. At the outset, you're in opposing corners: Your baby wants to be awake with you, and you want to sleep all night. Only a negotiation can settle the difference.

Right now, your baby is winning that negotiation hands down because he's using his one big tool: screaming. If you think about it, that's all he has to throw at the situation. He can't e-mail you, write a letter, call you on the phone, talk it over, or even pay you to come see him at 2 a.m. But then, he doesn't need to, does he?



As long as you go to your tot each time he opens his mouth and yells, you lose at the parent-child negotiation game. The instant you realize that you hold the moral high ground (because a good night's sleep is beneficial for both of you), you can stop investing so much power in your tyke's strategy and start setting your own terms. In Part II of this book, we tell you how to change the rules of the nighty-night game and walk away from the bedtime negotiations with a deal that works for both of you.

Factoring in your tot's personality and other issues

If a single blueprint could solve every tot's sleep problems, this book would be about six pages long. However, because each child is unique, you need to take your tot's personality — in addition to

her age and development — into account. These factors, as well as your own unique style, play a big role in planning your approach to the bedtime negotiations, as we explain in Chapter 3.

In addition, your bedtime strategy needs to make allowances for a host of special circumstances that can influence your expectations of your little sweetie. Among them:

- ✔ A 4-month-old premature baby can't snooze through the night, and a tot with asthma can't doze peacefully if she's wheezing. In Chapters 12 and 13, we look at adaptations that promote sleep if your tot is an early bird or has medical issues.
- ✔ A little darling who's coping with a big life-change like a new sibling or her parents' divorce has more trouble sleeping than a tot whose life is on an even keel. As a result, she needs a little special handling — a topic we cover in Chapter 14.
- ✔ If you're co-sleeping with your tot, something we discuss in Chapter 9, you need to handle the big switch when your sweetie heads off to her own bed.
- ✔ Potty-training adds a new twist to the bedtime story, and you need a strategy for making a good night's sleep *and* dry pants a reality (an issue we cover in Chapter 8).
- ✔ Is your sweetie a sleepwalker or sleep-talker? Does she experience those bizarre episodes called *sleep terrors*? If so, you need to know why these events occur and what you should and shouldn't do about them — a topic we discuss in Chapter 7.
- ✔ If your little cub is starting day care or preschool soon, you can expect some sleep setbacks. Chapter 11 offers advice on getting her back on track.

Sleep routines get even more complicated when you have more than one child because each tyke comes with her own set of needs, wants, and personality quirks — and if the sibs are twins or triplets, you really have your hands full! (We offer tips on all of these topics in Chapter 10.)

Setting Yourself Up for Success

Ready to say “Goodbye” to sleepless nights and “Hello” to sweet dreams? If so, it's time to get in the right frame of mind for the challenge ahead. Here are two more key pieces to put in place before you start.

Losing the quilt

Still feeling a twinge of guilt about expecting your tot to sleep through the night? If so, you're only human. (In fact, if you're not feeling guilty about *something* on a regular basis, you're not yet a parent!)

Maybe you're thinking, "I'm doing this for my own sake because I'm so tired of getting up." And of course, that's true — you have needs, and one of them is sleep! In truth, however, you're really taking this step for your child because

- ✔ This is the first big solution he gets to come up with in his little life.
- ✔ When he figures out how to comfort himself to sleep and stay in his own bed all night long, he gets a big shot of confidence. This self-assurance makes future steps toward independence (staying with a babysitter, using the potty, and so on) much easier for him to master.
- ✔ When your sweetie sleeps long and soundly, he's rested and ready to face the day.



Even more important, your child needs *you* to be well-rested! Just think of all the jobs you do and why you can do them better when you're not droopy and baggy-eyed:

- ✔ **You're his personal driver.** Not surprisingly, a rested driver is a safer driver. About 100,000 car crashes occur in the United States each year because drivers are sleepy.
- ✔ **You're his best teacher.** Exploring the wonderful world together is lots more fun when you're bright-eyed and bushy-tailed.
- ✔ **You're the light of his life.** Your baby adores you, and he needs you to stay happy and healthy. Staying well-rested helps protect you from lots of medical problems (including postpartum depression if you're a new mom). In fact, according to an important study in *Pediatrics* (May 2007), moderate or severe sleep problems in infants nearly double the chance that mothers will experience severe psychological distress and poor overall health — even if they have no mental health issues before delivery. For dads, the odds of developing poor overall health go up 50 percent when infants have significant sleep problems.

As professionals, we've met thousands of new parents. The happiest ones are the parents who lovingly set limits on sleep and other aspects of their tots' lives, not the ones who wearily (and then resentfully) cater to their tot's whims.

✓ **You're his rudder.** Whether he realizes it or not, your little cherub counts on you to guide him through the sometimes choppy waters of childhood. If you don't offer guidance at the simpler stages early on — and sleep is one — he won't be confident that you can help him through more difficult times that are sure to come.

To keep all of your family strong, happy, and full of bounce (and to strengthen your relationship with your little one), nothing beats a good night's sleep.

Gaining the confidence that leads to success

Your baby's birth begins a lifelong dance. Sometimes she leads and you follow; other times, you need to take her firmly by the hand and show her some new steps. The trick is knowing when to lead and when to follow because your goal is to give her everything she needs while encouraging her to stand on her own two feet (or lie on her own pillow, in this case!).



Earlier generations of parents had an easier time making these decisions. For centuries, people raised their kids very much like their own parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents did. But today's families often live hundreds of miles from their closest kin. As a result, Moms and Dads have a harder time knowing whether they're doing the best they can for their tots.

Making sure you're in good shape

Depression is very common, affecting up to 25 percent of all people at any one time. And it's also one of the most common threats to feeling good as a new parent; in fact, at least 10 percent of all mothers experience postpartum depression.

Our advice? Always seek treatment for depression. In fact, as a new parent, you have an especially good reason: your baby's well-being. A parent's depression strongly affects a newborn, infant, or child, and in particular can result in sleep problems.

So as you prepare to tackle your tot's sleep issues, be sure to start with this question: Do I have any signs of depression? These signs include sadness, change in appetite, loss of energy (beyond what you'd expect as a new parent), and loss of interest in life or in your baby. If you have any concerns, call your obstetrician or a qualified counselor right away. Also, see *Postpartum Depression For Dummies* by Shoshana S. Bennett and Mary Jo Codey (Wiley).



Stories from the crib: A declaration of independence

Latrice, a nurse with three kids under the age of 4, felt guilty about her middle child, Lamont. Lamont was only 1 year old when Latrice became pregnant with his little brother, and she felt bad that Lamont didn't get to be the baby for long. To add to her guilt, Lamont — unlike his brothers — didn't adjust well to childcare.

At 2 years of age, Lamont still woke up twice each night. Latrice offered him a bottle each time to get him back to sleep. She dragged through her work days and dreaded the nights, but she couldn't break the cycle.

Finally, Latrice attended a parenting workshop where she learned to tell the difference between Lamont's needs and his wants. She also realized that her guilt kept her trapped in an intolerable routine.

Using the strategies from the workshop, Latrice devised a sleep plan and stuck to it. First, she weaned Lamont from his middle-of-the-night bottles. Next, she stopped running to him when he cried and let him comfort himself to sleep.

A few weeks later, Latrice showed up at the parenting group and announced, "My life has changed!" Lamont was now sleeping through the night, and the newly-energized Latrice could offer him quality time in the mornings and evenings — instead of at 2 a.m.!

If your child's lack of sleep is causing stress in your life, you're not alone; at least one-third of all families have the same problem! We've counseled more than 10,000 of these families, and with very rare exceptions (usually when the tots or their parents have other, very serious life issues), the techniques we describe in this book work like a charm.

In the following chapters we offer you lots of information and plenty of advice because we want you to tackle your tot's sleep routine with confidence. We believe the more you know about sleep and good strategies, the more easily you can lovingly smooth your child's path to Slumberland. So rest easy — you're doing the right thing, and everyone (including your little night owl) will be better off!