

# What Exactly Is Sleep Training?

“Sleep training” has turned into the Internet’s hottest parenting debate. Misunderstandings abound, leaving many well-meaning parents confused about whether it would help or harm their baby. Rest assured, sleep training doesn’t just mean crying it out until your baby gives up and falls asleep. It simply means **teaching an infant to fall asleep and stay asleep independently**.

In this book, you will learn a systematic framework to get great sleep for your baby, and how to tune in to understand them on a deep level and meet their needs. Following principles of developmental psychology, you’ll learn how to lay a foundation for quality sleep and then give them an opportunity to learn independence. The result is your baby efficiently learning how to fall asleep on their own. This leads to streamlined bedtime and naptime, predictable long naps, and sleeping through the night.

Imagine teaching a child to ride a bike. While there may be a few concentrated days spent in active training and learning, certainly it’s more involved than just handing a child a two-wheeler and saying “good luck.” The days, weeks, and months of mastering balance and coordination generally culminate into one weekend of practice, with support. The process may look slightly different from child to child, but the principles stay the same. First, help them establish a good foundation to start from. Then, give them space and opportunity when they can handle it; give them assistance when they need it.

Similarly, for the first four months of your baby’s life you’re fully supporting them to get great sleep. As their brain and their sleep

system are developing, you'll work together to lay the groundwork for an optimal sleep foundation. Then, once they're developmentally ready, you step back and see what they can do on their own.

Sleep training is about so much more than the few days that you might allow for protest while they learn. It's about diligently building a strong sleep foundation and then taking the next step to teach your baby independent sleep skills in a way that feels aligned for you and works best for them. You'll learn a tried and true approach that works best for most babies, but you'll also learn how to adapt those principles to your baby and make modifications as needed.

Getting great sleep is one of the best gifts you can give your children to set them up for success mentally, emotionally, and developmentally. The better babies are sleeping, the better parents can be sleeping. And when parents are sleeping well, family systems can thrive.

We know how important sleep is, and that sleep training is an effective way to establish healthy sleep habits. But how and why does it work?

## **Sleep Architecture**

Sleep happens in waves, called *sleep cycles*. We have periods of sleep that are deeper and more restorative, and periods of sleep that are more shallow and active. If babies can learn to fall asleep independently, they can use that same skillset to sleep cycle transition in the middle of the night or naps, leading to less sleep disturbance.

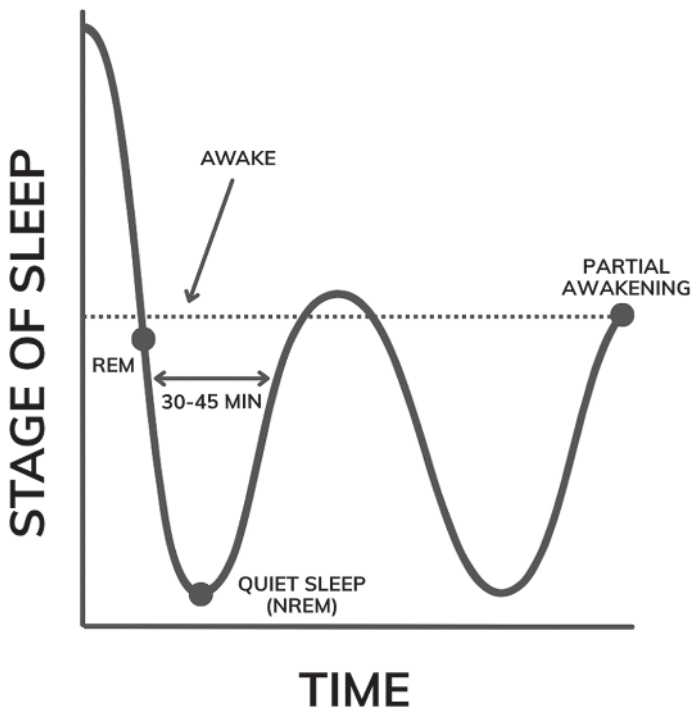
To illustrate this point, let's think of a child swimming. If a child has the skills to go from the surface of the pool and swim 5 feet down on their own to grab a dive toy, we can assume that even after they float back to the surface to take a breath, they'll be able to swim back down to the bottom again. They'll do this over and over again for the course of their time at the pool.

If, however, every time they wanted to get to the bottom of the pool they needed you to give them a push to get them on the

trajectory of going down deep, then every time they came back to the surface they'd need that boost again.

It is the same with sleep cycles. If a baby relies on support to get into deep sleep initially, they'll likely need support to get *back* to deep sleep again. When their sleep gets shallow and they're ready for the next sleep cycle, they'll wake all the way up and call for you to help give them that boost again.

## BABY SLEEP CYCLES



Just as you and I (hopefully) transition through cycles smoothly all night long, our babies too can navigate that shallow sleep period without fully waking. If they do, it's a brief period of readjustment and resettling that they can do on their own without support, just like

you or I might scratch our nose, readjust the pillow, roll over and fall back to sleep without much fuss.

Many well-meaning parents are more than willing to sacrifice their own sleep to give their babies this boost through sleep cycle transitions. Sometimes because they don't think that Baby is capable of this on their own, or sometimes because the temporary drama of teaching this skill feels daunting and overwhelming. Worse, sometimes because they've been exposed to the false narrative that it's unloving, or even *damaging* to facilitate this independent learning process.

On the contrary, there is protest in all aspects of development, and it's our job as parents to lovingly guide our children to independence and resilience so that one day they might be self-assured, confident, capable children and adults. Sometimes this is uncomfortable for them and for us, but it's an important part of their growth, development, and self-esteem. It's not something we do *to* our children; it's something we do *for* them.

## **Sleep as the Cornerstone of Well-Being**

In the chapters to come, I'll make a case for quality sleep and why prioritizing it is the most efficient way to increase your baseline of family happiness and well-being. Mental health is the biggest reason I'm so passionate about sleep. A well-rested family system can be a thriving family system.

I grew up with a mom who struggled deeply with mental health and sleep. As a kid, it was heartbreaking and confusing to watch her struggle. I wanted to help, but I couldn't fix it. Of course now I know it wasn't mine to fix, but that experience planted a seed. Years later, I became a therapist drawn to helping people untangle the pain I had seen up close.

As a professional, I started noticing a pattern: my clients who felt the most “stuck” in depression, anxiety, resentment, or strained relationships almost always struggled with sleep. No matter how much progress we made in therapy, if they weren’t sleeping well, everything else seemed to stall. So I got additional training in Advanced Behavioral Sleep Medicine and learned that 80% of people with a mental health diagnosis have co-occurring sleep issues.<sup>1</sup>

When I had my first baby, the overwhelm of feeling out of my depth, sleep deprivation, and hormone disruption led to postpartum depression and anxiety hitting me like a truck. I’m typically extroverted, energetic, and optimistic, but I remember wishing everyone would just take the baby and leave so I could cry by myself. When passive darker thoughts crept in and I started doubting myself, wondering if I was cut out for this, I knew I needed help.

I was *devastated*.

I felt like I was failing as a mom and failing as a therapist because “I have all the skills and tools so I shouldn’t be depressed.” On a deeper level, I felt like I had failed my own mom. She’d spent her entire life trying to tee me up to be happier than she was, and here I was struggling in the same ways that scared me so much to witness as a child. I felt like I was failing everything and everyone, and I was crushed.

I knew in my soul that I just needed more sleep. If I could get my baby to sleep better, I could sleep better and would begin to thrive. And of course, I knew that therapy and medication are valuable tools too, if needed.

I wish I could tell you it was all rainbows and butterflies after that. Helping my baby sleep well was a way more complicated puzzle than I realized it would be, made worse by all of the “parenting experts” out there fighting over best-practices.

So I went straight to the data and found that:

1. Infant sleep is critical for their optimal development, their positive temperament, and my mental health, which in turn positively boosts mother-child attachment.<sup>2,3,4,5,6</sup>
2. Cry-it-out methods are safe and effective.<sup>7,8,9,10</sup>

To be clear, “cry it out” is not the only way to sleep train your baby, and I will teach you other methods later, but I learned that it is a viable option.<sup>11</sup>

Armed with those two indisputable truths, I went back to the dozens of parenting books and blogs to try to piece together a path that would work for me and my baby. I realized I could take what worked and leave what didn’t and weighed advice with my own best judgment.

Eventually, I figured out a path to get fantastic sleep for my baby. I got my own sleep back on track, and I started thriving as a mom. Then I did it three more times and along the way created a sleep training method that has helped hundreds of thousands of families worldwide with a 97% success rate.

I can confidently say that I’ve cracked the code on optimizing baby sleep, helping parents to customize a plan to work for their family and their baby’s nuances.

When your baby is sleeping better, you can sleep better. And when you get better sleep, you will thrive. A thriving parent(s) means thriving children. It’s a beautiful upward cycle of positive outcomes.