

Sleep and settling for early childhood

Factsheet 8: Preventing sleep concerns: babies 6–12 months



Summary

- To strengthen the bond with your baby as they grow and develop, you need to provide lots of love, attention and different experiences.
- Learning about your baby and their tired signs will help to settle your baby. They usually need your help to settle and go back to sleep.
- Babies usually need a cue to tell them it is time to go to sleep. This is usually something in their external environment such as consistent and predictable sleep and wake times, a bath, or a quiet space with dim lighting.
- Regular daytime and bedtime routines are predictable and calming for your baby and can prevent sleep problems.

Learning about your baby

To strengthen the bond with your baby as they grow, you need to provide lots of love, attention and different experiences.

How you bond with your baby will change as they grow and develop.

They also start to develop attachments to other people and special objects, like toys.

Babies can also develop a fear of people they don't know or get upset when you leave them with other people.

It is important that you keep talking to your baby, making eye contact and playing with them.

By learning about your baby you will understand their cues and be able to support positive sleep patterns.

More information on bonding with your baby is available on the Raising Children's website [bonding with your baby](https://raisingchildren.net.au/babies/connecting-communicating/bonding/bonding-babies) <<https://raisingchildren.net.au/babies/connecting-communicating/bonding/bonding-babies>>.

Responsive settling

Learning about your baby and their tired signs will help you to settle your baby. Understanding their tired signs can help to respond to their sleep and settling needs.

Babies still wake overnight between sleep cycles and if they need to be fed or changed.

They usually need your help to settle and go back to sleep.

Each baby is different. Your baby's ability to settle comes down to their individual temperament.

Some babies are very difficult to settle. This can be stressful and upsetting. Your self-care is important. If you need a break, place your baby in their cot and walk away for a few minutes. To find out more about your self-care, download Factsheet 14: Selfcare for parents and caregivers from the [Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health) <<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health>>.

Tired signs

When your baby is tired, they show signs or cues that they are tired. If you learn to recognise these signs, you can encourage your baby to go to sleep at the right time.

Babies from 6–12 months might be tired after two to three hours of being awake.

Tired signs for this age groups can include:

- clumsiness
- clinginess
- grizzling or crying
- demands for attention
- boredom with toys
- fussiness with food.

Helping your baby to settle

Things you can do to help settle your baby include:

- Gently patting or stroking your baby in their cot.
- Using gentle shushing noises, settling music or white noise
- Use a dummy (if your child is already using one), however this may be hard to do for a long time if your baby wakes when they drop it. For more information on using a dummy for sleeping, read the Red Nose [safe sleep information](https://rednose.org.au/resources/education) <<https://rednose.org.au/resources/education>>

If one approach doesn't work after five minutes, move on to a different approach.

Continue with the approach until the baby is quiet, but not asleep.

Put your baby in their cot when they are tired, but still awake.

This helps your baby learn to settle by themselves and stops them from relying on these approaches to get to sleep.

If your baby still does not settle

If your baby still does not settle, you can:

- check they do not need a nappy change
- check they are not too hot or too cold
- check that they are not hungry
- try going for a walk in the pram
- give your baby a bath or massage

Some things like cuddling or holding your baby until they fall asleep might be difficult to keep doing for the long term, as it may create a negative sleep behaviour and patterns for your baby. They may then only be able to fall asleep if you cuddle or hold them. It is up to you to decide whether you can maintain these types of routines.

Creating sleep routines and environments

Routines and environments play a big part in helping babies get to sleep.

Babies need a cue to tell them it is time to go to sleep. This is usually something in their external environment.

It could be a dark room or having familiar objects around them.

Sleep environment

Some things you can do to create a good sleep environment for your baby include:

- darkened and quiet environments
- having a bath at night
- consistent and predictable bedtimes and wake times
- positive bedtime routines including pre-sleep associations such as reading, lullabies and taking your baby to where they usually sleep.

Bedtime routines

Bedtime routines help your baby develop positive sleep patterns and behaviour and can prevent sleep problems.

Regular daytime and bedtime routines can help your baby to fall asleep and stay asleep. They let your baby know that sleep is coming.

They are predictable and calming for your baby.

Some things you can do include:

- keeping the routine short – no more than 15 to 30 minutes
- using the same relaxing activities before bed every day, such as a warm bath, a massage, reading stories or singing lullabies
- creating a calm, quiet, dark and warm environment, with no television.

Use regular bed times, nap times and wake times to help your baby develop a good sleep–wake rhythm.

Feed, play, sleep

Research shows that it's good to keep using the same sleep routine as your baby grows and develops.

Feed, play, sleep is a daytime routine you can use for babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers to establish positive sleep patterns and behaviour.

- **Feed** your child the appropriate diet for their developmental stage.
- Encourage **play** time during the day. Examples of play time for babies include:
 - floor time
 - reading
 - singing
 - sitting in a pram outside.
- Watch for the first **tired signs** and then put your baby to bed.

Feed, play, sleep is most effective if done throughout the day. You should reduce play at night and provide a quiet and dim environment so that your baby understands the difference between day and night.

Feeding is a very important part of the routine. With a healthy and adequate diet, your baby will have energy for play, which in turn encourages positive sleep behaviours.

Self-settling

Self-settling is when your baby learns to settle and fall asleep by themselves.

You can help your baby learn how to self-settle.

When your baby learns to self-settle, they don't need to rely on you to settle them.

They can get back to sleep by themselves if they wake overnight (except if they need to feed).

Self-settling may help your baby to sleep for longer periods at night.

To help your baby learn to self-settle you can:

- make sure the room is dark and quiet
- put your baby into their cot when they are tired, but still awake. This helps them learn to associate being in bed with settling and falling asleep.

Safe sleeping

Many parents worry about their baby's risk of Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI). This is when a baby dies suddenly and unexpectedly. Although it can happen at any time, it often occurs during sleep.

To help your baby sleep safely follow these simple rules from Red Nose:

- sleep baby on their back
- keep their head and face uncovered
- keep your baby's environment smoke free
- have a safe sleep environment
- sleep baby in a safe cot in your room
- breastfeed

Although the rates of SUDI are declining, in Australia, it is the major cause of unexpected death in babies aged between four weeks and 12 months.

For more information on safe sleeping we recommend that you read the Red Nose [safe sleep brochure](https://rednose.org.au/resources/education) <<https://rednose.org.au/resources/education>>.

Sharing a sleep surface

A considerable proportion of SUDI occurs when parents or caregivers share a sleep surface with a baby. This is also called co-sleeping or bed-sharing.

It is recommended by Red Nose that the safest place for babies to sleep is in their own cot next to your bed for the first six to 12 months of life.

Red Nose has a [safer co-sleeping brochure](https://rednose.org.au/resources/education) for parents that has tips for safer co-sleeping. <<https://rednose.org.au/resources/education>>

To receive this form in an accessible format [email Maternal and Child Health and Parenting](mailto:MCH@dhhs.vic.gov.au) <MCH@dhhs.vic.gov.au>.

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Available at the [Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health) <<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health>>

This factsheet is based on research undertaken by KPMG on behalf of the Department of Health and Human Services. The research included a comprehensive overview of contemporary research, and evidence-based approaches and interventions for sleep and settling in early childhood. It considered developmentally appropriate strategies and cultural diversity. Download the full research report from the [MCH Service webpage](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/maternal-child-health) <<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/maternal-child-health>>.