

# Safer Sleep Awareness

A Guide for Childminders, Foster Carers,  
Nannies and Nursery Settings



# Whether you are caring for a baby or child in a foster care, child-minding, nannying or in a nursery setting, it is important that you are aware of the risks of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

While SIDS is rare, it can still happen. It is important that you are aware of the risks and the steps you can take to help reduce those risks.

By understanding what SIDS is and recognising the risks, you can fulfil your duty of care for babies you are looking after and keep them as safe as possible.

Our safer sleep advice covers babies up to 12 months of age, or 12 months from the due date for babies born prematurely.

## What causes SIDS?

We do not know what causes SIDS. For many babies it is likely that a combination of factors affect them at a vulnerable stage of their development, which leads them to die suddenly and unexpectedly.

However, we do know you can significantly reduce the chance of SIDS occurring by following our safer sleep advice.

Around 86% of SIDS deaths happen when a baby is six months old or less.

After this time, the risk is reduced, however SIDS can still happen so we recommend following safer sleep advice up to 12 months.



## Safer Sleep Advice

### Sleeping Position

- All babies should be placed on their back for every sleep, day and night, as the chance of SIDS is particularly high for babies who are sometimes placed on their front or side.
- Sleeping a baby on their front or side greatly increases the chance of SIDS.

### Sleeping Place

'Sharing a bed with a baby is something that many families do, either intentionally or not. There is a lot of information on bedsharing in our [guide for parents](#), but for those caring for a baby in an early years setting, it is not recommended that you share a bed or other sleep surface with a baby. You may not be aware if a baby was born prematurely for example, so it is safer to assume they are at high risk and give them a separate sleep space. Sharing a sofa or armchair with a sleeping baby is particularly dangerous.

- The safest place for babies to sleep is in a Moses Basket, cot, travel cot or carrycot on a firm, flat mattress with a waterproof, wipeable cover. Beanbags, sofas, bouncy chairs, pods/nests, cushions and car seats are not suitable sleep surfaces for babies and significantly increase the risk of SIDS.
- Ensure the equipment your setting is using for the babies' sleep space has passed necessary safety checks and follow the manufacturer's guidance that come with any products you use.

## Temperature

- It is important to make sure that the baby's room is a comfortable temperature – not too hot or too cold. The chance of SIDS is higher in babies who get too hot, so keep the room temperature between 16 -20°C. Recording and documenting room temperature during infant sleeps helps ensure babies are being cared for within the recommended limits.
- It can be difficult to judge the temperature in the room, so use a room thermometer in the rooms where the babies sleep.
- Babies do not need to wear hats indoors, nor sleep in outdoor wear such as snow suits/winter coats etc.
- The best way to check baby's temperature is by putting your hand on the skin on their chest or the back of their neck. Don't use their hands or feet as a guide as they will always feel cooler than the rest of their body. If the baby is too hot you will feel the skin is hot, slightly clammy or sweaty, and you will need to remove some layers.
- Ensure the baby's sleep space is not positioned next to a radiator or next to a window in direct sunlight.



## Mattresses

Parents/carers are advised to have a new mattress for each child within their own home, however this may not be practical within the early years setting.

- Check that the mattress is still firm, flat and is in good condition with no rips, tears or sagging. We also recommend that the mattress is protected by a waterproof cover, wiped down with anti-bacterial spray and that a freshly washed sheet is used over the mattress. All mattresses should be inspected and replaced immediately if there are any signs of damage.
- Have a method to record when new mattresses are bought e.g. putting a sticker on the underside of the mattress works well.
- Ensure the space between the cot and mattress is no more than 3cm.

- Do not use cot bumpers as they pose a risk to babies once they begin to roll and move in the cot. There have been a number of cases in the UK and abroad where infants have become entangled in the ties and material, or fallen from pulling themselves up on the bumpers.
- A baby sleep bag is a good option as it reduces the risk of blankets and sheets being kicked off and covering baby's head and is a safer option than using loose bedding, which we wouldn't recommend. Baby sleep bags should be well fitted, so the baby can't wriggle down inside. Use the correct tog rating for the time of year. There is no need to use any additional bedding when using a baby sleep bag.

## Bedding

- Firmly tucked in sheets and blankets (not above shoulder height) or a baby sleep bag are safe for a baby to sleep in. Sleep baby in the feet-to-foot position (baby's feet at the bottom of the cot) and avoid using soft or bulky bedding such as quilts, pillows and duvets. Remember that one blanket doubled over counts as two blankets.



## Clear Cot

There is evidence to suggest that babies are at higher risk of SIDS if they have their heads covered and some items added to a cot may increase the risk of head-covering. Unnecessary items in a baby's cot can also increase the risk of accidents.

While evidence on individual items is not widely available, it makes sense to be as cautious as possible.

We therefore recommend babies are slept in cots that are kept as clear as possible and specifically advise:

- No pillows or duvets.
- No cot bumpers.
- No soft toys.
- No loose bedding.
- No pods or nests.
- No products (such as wedges or straps) that will keep the baby in one sleeping position.

## Pods and nests

These products are not entirely flat, firm or waterproof.

We know from research that the safest place to sleep a baby is always going to be on an entirely flat, firm surface, with no soft or thick padding or bedding around them. This is to reduce the chance of overheating, which can increase the risk of SIDS. It is also because anything with raised sides or cushioned areas might pose a risk if a baby wriggles into a position where their mouth and nose become covered and they are unable to breathe properly.



## Smoking

There is strong, consistent evidence from studies worldwide that smoking during and after pregnancy increases the risk of SIDS. Exposure to secondhand smoke also significantly increases the risk of SIDS and the risk increases further where both parents/carers smoke.

If you are caring for a baby and you do not know if their mum has smoked or has been exposed to secondhand smoke in pregnancy or postnatally, then you may not know if that baby is at higher risk, so it is very important to follow all other safer sleep advice.

Your place of work or employers will have a non-smoking policy, however, you still need to be aware of the risks of smoking and SIDS. The Statutory Framework for the EYFS 2021 states providers must not allow smoking in or on the premises when children are present or about to be present.

Cigarette smoke and all of the chemicals associated with smoking clings to clothes, hair and skin so we would advise against holding a baby after smoking.

There is currently no research on e-cigarettes and SIDS but using e-cigarettes seems to be much safer than smoking. Giving up completely is the best option, but if you do choose to use an e-cigarette, continue to keep babies and children away from e-cigarettes and their vapour.



## Dummies

Dummies have been found to help reduce the chance of SIDS, but only when these are used consistently for every sleep.

- When a baby uses a dummy it should be offered at every sleep period, including daytime naps. Therefore, it is important to check with the baby's parents/carers if they use a dummy before using one.
- Don't force the baby to take a dummy or put it back in if the baby spits it out.
- Don't use a neck cord.
- If the dummy falls out during sleep do not wake the baby to put it back in, however, if the baby wakes it can be offered again.
- Don't coat the dummy with something sweet.

## Swaddling

Whilst we do not advise for or against swaddling, we do urge you to follow the advice below:

- Use thin materials.
- Never put a swaddled baby to sleep on their front
- Stop swaddling (with arms wrapped inside the material) when a baby shows signs of rolling
- Ensure baby is not overdressed under the swaddle, has their head uncovered and does not have an infection or fever.
- Baby should be swaddled securely to reduce the risk of face-covering by loose material.
- Check the baby's temperature to ensure they do not get too hot. DO NOT USE blankets or place any additional bedding over a swaddled baby, this could cause them to overheat.

- Swaddles should not be applied very tightly around the hips as this is strongly associated with developmental dysplasia of the hip.

If you are looking after a baby, you should ask how the baby is slept at home and make sure your plans fit with their usual safer sleep routine.

## Sleep Supervision

There is evidence that when infants are placed in the same room as their parents/carers, but they do not share the same sleep surface (i.e. room-sharing not bed-sharing), a significant decrease in the risk of SIDS is seen; therefore babies should be in the same room as an adult for all sleep periods.

In a nursery environment, sleeping babies should be closely supervised.

We don't advise on how nursery/early year settings achieve these requirements, and it is down to your individual nursery's procedural guidance on how you meet this requirement, such as a member of staff being present in a dedicated sleep room whilst the babies sleep or regular monitoring by members of staff in an open plan room.

## Car seats

Car seats should only be used for transport and not as an alternative for cots or high chairs. It's OK for babies to fall asleep in a car seat when travelling, but they should be taken out as soon as they get to your early years setting, and placed onto a firm, flat surface to sleep.

There is no published evidence which sets out how long babies should be kept in a car seat when travelling. However, infant healthcare professionals, safety experts and most car manufacturers recommend that babies should not be in a car seat for longer than 2 hours at a time and they should be taken out frequently.



There may be an occasion when parents/carers do something that goes against safer sleep guidance, for example they may ask that their baby is slept in a pod/nest – you need to consider what to do in those circumstances – e.g. explain why you can't use it in your setting, having something written down in a policy and procedure document may help.

If you have any concerns about safer sleep or you are worried about looking after someone else's baby you can contact us for advice and support. You can call our free Information line 0808 802 6869 or email [info@lullabytrust.org.uk](mailto:info@lullabytrust.org.uk)

We also train and provide information to professionals who support families, to make sure families receive consistent advice and are equipped with the knowledge to sleep their baby more safely.

For more information on safer sleep training email [training@lullabytrust.org.uk](mailto:training@lullabytrust.org.uk) or visit [lullabytrust.org.uk/professionals/sids-training](http://lullabytrust.org.uk/professionals/sids-training)

## Further support

If you have any concerns about safer sleep or you are worried about looking after someone else's baby you can contact us for advice and support.

If a baby who you were looking after has died whether in your nursery, in your home, in foster care or while you were caring for the baby in the parents/carers' home, you are likely to be experiencing shock and grief. You may find it helpful to talk to an understanding person- You can phone The Lullaby Trust's free Helpline for support 0808 802 6868. Open Mon- Fri 10am - 5pm, Sat & Sun 6pm - 10pm.

The Lullaby Trust

[www.lullabytrust.org.uk](http://www.lullabytrust.org.uk)

T: 020 7802 3200

Information line: 0808 802 6869 (Freephone)

Registered charity no: 262191

