



sleeping tips

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Teaching a baby of 9 to 12 months to self-settle

By Tizzie Hall

Many parents first contact me when their babies are around nine months old and in most cases, there is a similar theme to the calls. They will tell me that they had a good sleeper until about six months of age but their baby has started to frequently wake at night.

These parents often believe that teething is the cause of the sudden onset of night waking behaviour, as this is about the time that teething starts for many babies. But in most cases the start of night-time sleep cycles, is the cause of this sudden night waking.

For the next three months, these parents spend the nights hoping the teething will go away and that their baby will resume its all-night sleeping routine again. However, by about nine months when the waking is getting more frequent and baby is often starting to stand up in their cot, they contact me for help.

Once I assess the parental behaviour and home environment, it often becomes clear that these babies have never learned to fall asleep without assistance from a human or pacifying aid.

This assistance could be in the form of being rocked, patted, fed or even being allowed to suck on a dummy / pacifier / soother to go to sleep.

Before a baby reaches six months of age, this problem does not seem evident in nighttime sleeping. In these very early stages of development, if all other needs are satisfied, you can assist a baby towards slumber and she will comfortably sleep all night. But at about six months this changes because the baby is becoming more aware of its surroundings, relationships and needs. If being aided in going to sleep, the baby starts to wake at night looking for the same comfort in order to resettle.

The laying down approach

In such circumstances, I explain to parents that we need to teach their baby the skill of self-settling. Personally, I disagree with controlled crying as a means of teaching babies the skill of self-settling or resettling. In my opinion, walking in and out is teasing your baby and only makes your baby and you emotional. What I do recommend is what I call the "laying down approach", which shows your baby what you want him to do.

I use this approach for babies that are between nine and 12 months of age. The reason for this is because I am never sure if they know what you want them to do when you put them in their cot. So by using this lay them down technique you are giving babies in this age group a clear message that you would like them to lie down and go to sleep.

The first step is to adhere as closely as possible to a proven 24-hour routine suitable for the age of your baby. It may sound silly but start by telling your baby what you are planning to do for a few days before you start this procedure. Let your baby know in a firm but soothing voice, that you will be putting him to bed while awake and without the usual

assistance and that irrespective of how much protesting goes on, you will not be getting him up until he has had a good sleep. This may be bolstering your resolve as much as helping the baby but I also believe parents should never underestimate their ability to communicate with their babies.

The thing I like about this method is that your baby actually shouts rather than cries. It will sound like crying to you but the truth is, your baby is actually shouting at you to pick him up. Your baby is not crying out in pain or discomfort, so you must be strong and determined if you are to win this argument - and you will.

At this point it is important to remember that a noisy baby doesn't necessarily mean that something is seriously wrong. In teaching a baby to settle, inevitably there will be some protests but parents must accept that this will be less frequent and shorter in duration as your baby develops the skills it needs to settle to sleep. The challenge for parents is to learn to read the sounds made by their baby and to resist the temptation to comfort them every time they protest.

The laying down approach - How it's done

- Take your baby into his cot and emphasise that it is bedtime and that you will be there again when he has had a sleep. It is a good idea at this point to have a bedtime ritual that you do each sleep. It could be shutting the curtains and saying goodnight to the cars parked outside in the street or you could simply say goodnight to a few favorite soft toys.
- Then I suggest you give your baby his sleep comforter and start the lay down approach. Lay your baby down in his cot, whichever way your baby prefers to sleep, either on his tummy or back. Stand back a little and watch. If your baby has taught himself to stand up, he will do so at this stage.
- When he does stand up, gently lay him down again to give him a clear message about what you want him to do. Each time he stands up you respond by laying him back down again. Do this 15 times and then walk out of the room. At this point there will be loud protests but don't worry, you are going to win this argument and he will fall asleep.
- Stay out of the room for a minimum of 20 minutes. Please time these twenty minutes, as five minutes could seem like twenty when listening to your baby protest.
- After the twenty minutes, if you are feeling strong enough to listen to a bit more protesting please stay out. But if you feel you have to go to your baby, go in again and lay your baby down again. This time you are going to stay with your baby until your baby is asleep.
- This time you will lay your baby down about 40 times (trust me, this will work) and you will notice your baby is taking longer to stand up. At this point I recommend you put your hand on your baby's back when you lay him down. If your baby is trying to stand up don't resist, take your hand away and continue to lay your baby down as before. But if your baby is staying down keep your hand on your baby's back as a reward. Only leave your hand there for a minute, and then take your hand away again.
- Don't give up if your baby stands up again, just continue with the laying down technique until your baby starts to stay down, then use your hand as a comfort again. Stay with your baby until your baby is asleep. Yes you may see this as an aid but after a few nights your baby will start to fall asleep without you there.

Tip

When you are sure the baby is asleep wait 6 minutes before going in to reposition or cover him up.

Try not to reposition him too much; as you may accidentally move him away from something he was comforting himself with before falling asleep.

The laying down approach (continued)

This first argument is always the longest and hardest. Strong, healthy babies can protest for what seems to be an interminably long time. You can expect the second argument to be about half the time, and the third half again.

In my experience, on the fourth attempt, the baby usually goes down with little or no fuss. But just as you believe you are getting somewhere because your baby went down for his last sleep with little fuss he will give you the biggest battle ever. This happens on about day three. You will be able to win this because you are expecting it. If you get past this hurdle, your sleep problems will be solved. It is as if all the babies I have worked with give it one last big attempt to win and be in charge of their parents but after this last big attempt they decide to settle with no fuss from then on.

This method must be continued each night and day until your baby stops getting up. It may seem tedious but it is better than being woken every night for the next five years or more. It is also important that you take your hand off before your baby falls asleep, or your hand will become a sleep aid and the goal of self-settling will not be reached.

Each time you complete this ritual, move further away when you remove your hand. Once again, don't worry when moving away. Because, now, if your baby stands up again, you will know what to do. Your aim is to get further away each night so your baby starts to fall asleep alone.

How much sleep does a baby need?

Sleep is a skill we need to learn - you can't just turn it on and off - and it is one of the first skills you need to teach your baby. One in three children, under the age of five, do not have this skill; and out of these children, 30 per cent are said to have serious sleep problems. When adults get tired they tend to slow down, but when a child or baby gets tired the opposite occurs, and they will speed up and become hyperactive. An interesting study published in BBC News Online (24th April 2004), suggests that sleep problems in babies could lead to drug problems in the teenage years. This is the first study to look at the relationship between children's sleep problems and substance abuse in later life. Researchers from the University of Michigan claim that early sleep disruption does not mean a child will have substance abuse problems as a teenager, but that it could be a 'marker' for later issues. This is one more reason that parents should focus on healthy sleep habits for their children. Everyone is different in the amount of sleep they need, but the table below gives the average amount that I recommend. Some babies will sleep a lot more, and other's slightly less.

Age	Total hours in a 24 hour period	Total hours at night	Total hours during the day	Daytime sleeps or naps
Newborn	15 to 17 hours	10 11 hours in 2 5 hour blocks	5 to 6 hours	3 to 5
4 weeks	15 to 17 hours	10 - 11 hours (broken for feeds)	5 to 6 hours	3 to 4
3 months	16.45 hours	12 hours (broken for feeds)	4.45 hours	2 sleeps and 1 nap
5 months	16.15 hours	12 hours (broken for feeds)	4.15 hours	2 sleeps and 1 nap
7 months	16 hours	12 hours	4 hours	2 sleeps
9 months	15 hours	12 hours	3 hours	2 sleeps or 1 longer sleep and 1 nap
12 months	14 hours and 30 minutes	12 hours	2 hours and 30 minutes	1 sleep or 1 longer sleep and 1 nap
18 months	14 hours and 15 minutes	12 hours	2 hours and 15 minutes	1 sleep
2 years	14 hours	12 hours	2 hours	1 sleep
3 years	13 hours	12 hours	1 hour	1 nap

Please note that a sleep is when your baby sleeps for more than one sleep cycle; a nap is when your baby only sleeps for one sleep cycle or less.

