

Section 8:

Dream Night

Boot Camp at the Jones': Should I let my baby cry it out?

My very passionate first son who, by the way, also had colic until 4 months, was a challenge to get to sleep through the night. Oh, we made every excuse in the book. “Maybe he is gassy, or possible still hungry (at the 90% on the weight chart), or he’s hitting a growth spurt (for the second time this month), or better yet, he’s messing with our heads”. Mostly, it was none of the above. He needed to let off some steam. He needed to hollar and cry in order to wind himself down from a busy day. By age 4.5 months we decided to commit ourselves to 3 days of “crying it out”. We had no other choice. There was nothing more we could offer him. He was healthy, fed, dry, warm and cozy, AND HE WAS UPSET! Of course we considered that maybe he just needed some comfort from us. We tried that, too. We tried going in rocking, patting, singing, swaying, all but standing on our heads to get the little yellar to calm down. It would work temporarily, and as soon as we’d leave or 20-30min later, we were back at it. Every time we went in, the fire was fed, and it was even harder to get out of his room. So there was nothing more we could offer him, except SLEEP. And in order to accomplish that, we had to teach him how to do it.

The first night he probably cried on and off for 2.5-3hrs! I stopped looking at the clock. It broke my heart the more I heard him cry. I put in my earplugs, shut the door and turned off the monitor. He may have gotten up several more times throughout that night. The next morning he was excited to see me, all puffy-eyed and bushy-haired. Each night thereafter he cried less and less for about a total of 3 nights. Now he goes to bed awake without a fuss. If he happens to wake during the night, for the most part he is able to put himself back to sleep. If he is not, we know something is wrong and we go in to check on him.

Our second son was more laid-back. He liked some soothing before bed, but never required much. If he awoke in the middle of the night, a small amount of soothing went a long way. We were rarely in there very long, and he would be out for the rest of the night. He really did not require the “crying it out” method, except once after an illness when his sleep and schedule had become disrupted. Unlike our first son, he only cried 15-20 minutes the first night and even less the second night. And then he was done!

A baby can effectively learn from “crying it out” by around 4 months of age. Some sources say even earlier than that, but my experience says not. We had tried this with my first son at 2 and 3 months and it did not work. The process is difficult for parents, but when successful, it is a parent sleep vacation well earned.

Think of it this way. You became parents the moment your baby took his or her first breath. Your children will always look to you to guide them toward the healthiest coping mechanisms. For sleep, they receive comfort from you, next comfort from transitional objects, and finally they learn to comfort themselves. There are appropriate times to intervene developmentally. I advise you to try this method when your family is ready. As more time passes, however, it may become more and more challenging to start it. We recognize that some babies are still nursing and may not be ready to sleep all night at 4 months of age. The age between 4-6 months should be your goal. Sleeping through the night can be successful in 3-4 nights if you stick with it, despite how horrible you feel during the process.

Double Personality: The Sleepless Shapes

I believe that there are two types sleepless babies. The first is the baby who soothes easier and learns how to sleep through the night with the reassurance of the parent nearby, and then slowly the comfort that is required wanes. The second is the child who thinks he requires the parent nearby, but really is aroused by their presence and upset when it is withdrawn. These babies actually become worse sleepers with

attempted soothing. It is true, Some children do not take long to soothe and don't get up very often. If you don't mind going in during these times, that is fine. Some children truly benefit from the comfort of their parent every 15-20minutes if they are still crying and seem to settle better this way. These children are usually the ones that settle progressively more quickly with each time entering into their room. If your child seems to only get more awake and excited each time you enter into his room, then just check on him once, and leave the rest up to him and "crying it out".

In A Predictable Pickle

First, establish a predictable nightly bedtime routine. You can try a variation of bath, story time, down time, milk, brush teeth, then bed. If your baby does better with a dim night light, that's fine. Try to put baby down awake or drowsy. Give him his pacifier. If old enough to put his own pacifier in his mouth, drop several pacifiers in the crib with him. By age 6 months you can add a small silky "lovey" blankie for him to nuzzle up against. **TURN YOUR MONITOR OFF!!** That's right, turn it off! If your baby is crying you will hear him!

If Little Screamer wakes up crying...wait and listen. If you hear whining or low-volume crying let it go. If it escalates, go in after about 10 minutes (an eternity, I know). Don't make eye contact, don't talk to him, don't sing to him, and don't play games. **DO** check and see if his limbs are tangled in the slits of his bed, if the sheets are wet from urine, stool or vomit (hey, it happens), if his forehead is burning up. You can do this with one swoop of your arm across the crib. If he stops crying at your touch, most likely it's you he wants. If he's less than 6 months old, try patting him or pushing on the bed to rock him to soothe him back to sleep. Fish for one of the hundred pacifiers in there and pop it in his mouth. Locate his lovey, get him drowsy, and leave the room. If you need to, pick him up briefly (he may still have a burp if he's less than 6 months old) pat him, and lay him back down. If he's older, do not pick

him up. If he stands up, give him a hug & kiss, tell him it's time for bed (without elaborating). WALK AWAY.

Try to not go back in there again. You have already established that he is okay. There is nothing more he needs but to go to sleep.

Keep Out! It's Not Only For Teenagers

After checking in on your bundle of joy once, there is no need to go back in. There is nothing more that you can do for him. You've established he's ok, now he needs to settle himself. Doing this for him through rocking, feeding, playing, will only re-set the clock and put you back to the beginning. This is the tough part. It goes against every parental feeling inside of you. Turn your clock around (and with your monitor still off), put in your earplugs, and got to sleep. He will, too. It's pure agony to count the seconds of his wailing.

When a baby's schedule changes, you are traveling, or baby is sick, he may need some extra comforting for a short period of time until things are back to normal. Also, there may be nights when you feel that your child is teething and you give him some medicine before heading back to bed. When he is feeling better, it may take a night or two to get back to sleeping through the night, but the process should not take as long or be as brutal.

During times of quick development, babies may re-enact some of their milestones in their dreams, startle themselves awake, and then have a difficult time getting themselves back to sleep. These tend to be at 4months, 9 months and between 12-15 months. You may have to re-train your child over a couple of days during these times.

It is important to remember, that if this approach is done consistently for 3-4 nights, your child's crying should lessen each night and then disappear. If you wait until they are 2 or 3 year old to implement this, then you have a child that can get up and walk into your bed at any time.

This same approach can be applied to naps. However, once you get your child to self-soothe at night, then naps should follow suit. When you first try this method at nighttime, baby will be exhausted during the day from crying much of the night. It is important to still keep him awake and napping his usual schedule.