

Safer Sleep from day one: A professionals' guide



Safer sleep advice to prevent sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) has traditionally been given after a baby has been born. We now have specific information to give to families during pregnancy. This guide gives you some information about this advice, why it is important to give in pregnancy and how you can support families.

Why do you need to discuss safer sleep in the antenatal period?

Parents make decisions early in their pregnancy about what **baby products** they are going to buy, so **having a conversation early about safer sleep and sleep products** will help parents make more informed decisions.

The importance of having discussions about safer sleep advice in the antenatal period to expectant parents/carers was highlighted in the National Safeguarding Review report:

'Pregnancy is a reachable moment with families to identify pre-disposing risks of sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI) and signpost support, including targeted support' (Out of Routine Report, 2020).



Why safer sleep messages are vital

Safer sleep advice has reduced rates of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) by over 80% since the early 1990s, saving over 30,000 babies' lives. Whilst SIDS is rare, babies do still die suddenly and unexpectedly, and we know that the majority of babies who die have known risk factors, many of which we may be able to help parents to change.

Health professionals having these conversations with families over the last 30 years is one of the biggest reasons why SIDS is rare. Now we need to implement what we have learnt from families with the most vulnerable infants to save even more lives.



Talking to families

Safer sleep must be discussed with all families, regardless of their circumstances. Conversations around some areas of safer sleep advice can be challenging. We know that health professionals are a trusted source of advice and support, and that families appreciate a conversation about safety. This empowers them with information and advice to keep their baby as safe as possible.

It is important to explain **why the advice is important**. Parents don't necessarily connect with research statistics, but they will connect with concrete examples. For example, if a baby who can roll sleeps on a soft mattress, their face will push into the mattress and they might not be able to breathe. **Explain the messages in a way that is clear and simple to understand and avoid speaking too clinically.**



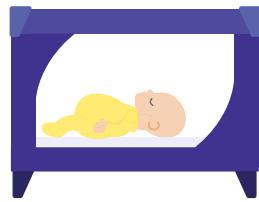
Don't assume parents will understand the information. Creating an environment where families can discuss their situations and concerns without fear of judgement is crucial. Research has shown the importance of tailoring support to the circumstances of vulnerable families and establishing trusting relationships with them.



Key points

1. Are they aware of safer sleep?

Give resources to all families and go through key advice: baby on back from day one, separate sleep space and the importance of keeping baby smoke free.



2. Is baby at high risk?

Such as smoking in pregnancy or likely to be premature or low birth weight. If so, ensure the family are aware of this and how important the messages are for them – refer to extra resources such as lullabytrust.org.uk/premature-babies



3. Talk about where the baby will sleep.

All babies need a separate sleep space – do they have one yet? Where will baby sleep in first few months?



4. Discuss co-sleeping:

They may not have considered this but explain this is a really important thing to think about as we know families will co-sleep without intending to. Make them aware of the high-risk situations that anyone can get into on any given night (e.g. exposed to smoking during pregnancy, drinking alcohol or being unwell).



5. Help families have a plan

if they think they might intentionally or unintentionally co-sleep. For example, have the cot or Moses basket close by the bed; prepare the bed or bedroom by removing or reducing adult bedding.



The National Child Mortality Database (NCMD) report on Sudden and Unexpected Deaths in Childhood, December 2023, showed that 52% of SIDS deaths in England were co-sleeping. 92% of these in high-risk situations and 60% of co-sleeping deaths had not been planned. It is vital that we ensure all families understand what high-risk co-sleeping is antenatally and in the early few days after their baby is born.

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6. Is there a history of sudden infant death in the family?

These conversations may raise family history. If so, refer to the Care of Next Infant (CONI) programme where appropriate and available: lullabytrust.org.uk/about-the-coni-programme/

7. Give the family our resources, such as the safer sleep from day one guide, and safer sleep for parents and carers guide.



Be aware that it may not be possible to find immediate solutions for all the risks identified. It may not be feasible for the family to change everything at once. Some things may take longer or need more support.

Consider families where parents/carers live apart. It is important that everyone caring for a baby, including grandparents, are aware of safer sleep advice.



For more information visit: lullabytrust.org.uk or call our free information line: 0808 802 6869

At The Lullaby Trust, we exist to keep babies safe and keep grieving families supported.

More information:

[NICE postnatal guidelines.](#)

[Royal College of Midwives guidance on safer sleep.](#)

