

Alcohol

and caring for your baby

A guide for professionals



the
lullaby
trust



Introduction

This booklet outlines how professionals can support families to plan how to care for their baby when they or their partner may be drinking alcohol.

At the Lullaby Trust, we advise families that there should always be a sober adult to care for their baby. A sober adult is someone who hasn't drunk any alcohol or taken any recreational drugs.

Alcohol affects skills like decision making and judgement, which are all needed when caring for a baby. It has also been shown to have a negative impact on sleep.

Some families might find that not drinking alcohol could be a good option, particularly within the first few months whilst their baby is at a vulnerable stage of development.

Your role is crucial - talking to families and supporting them with understanding how to avoid the specific risks for their baby.

Talking to families

It is important that health professionals working with families as part of their role have the knowledge that enables them to initiate conversations around safer sleep.

Discussions around some areas of safer sleep advice can be challenging, but creating an environment where families can discuss their situation and concerns without fear of judgement is crucial. This should be about helping families make informed decisions and empowering them with information and advice to help keep their baby safe.

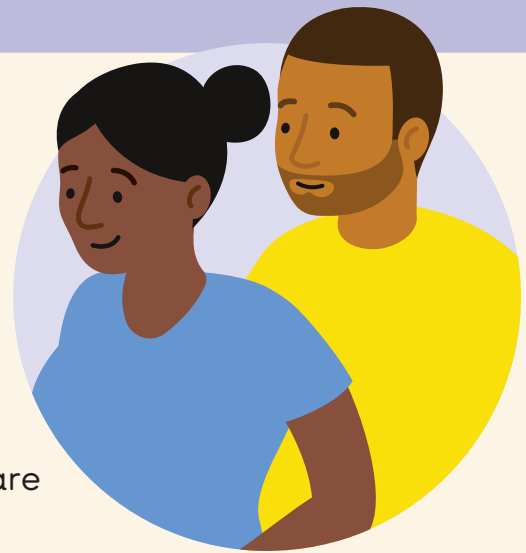
Using your communication skills to have sensitive and supportive conversations, you can help to make small but important changes to help reduce the risks of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI). The risks could be identified through conversation or through something you see.

Further advice on safer sleep and how to have these conversation with families can be found here: [safer-sleep-babies-guide-professionals.pdf](https://www.gov.scot/resources/publications/2017/07/20170701_safer_sleep_babies_guide_professionals.pdf) (www.gov.scot).

Planning ahead

We need to make sure families know:

- If they think they might drink alcohol, they need to have a sober adult around to take care of the baby.
- They could consider asking a trusted friend, partner, or a close family member to take care of their baby if they plan to drink alcohol.
- Alcohol can reduce reaction times, increase risk-taking behaviour and mean that families might make different decisions than those they would usually make. It's important, in case of an emergency that there is a sober adult there to care for their baby.
- Planning ahead is important so that families are able to follow the Scottish Government/NHS Scotland safer sleep advice. Unplanned changes and disrupted routines can impact on sleeping arrangements and can lead to an increased risk to babies.
- Whoever is looking after their baby should also be aware of the safer sleep advice.
- You might like to suggest to parents that they might find it helpful to share the Scottish Government/ NHS Scotland leaflet on safer sleep with whoever is looking after their baby: [Safer Sleep for babies a guide for parents and carers \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)



Safer sleep

It is important to talk about safer sleep advice with all families:

To reduce the risk of SIDS the safest place for a **baby to sleep is in their own separate, clear, firm, flat sleep space, such as a cot or Moses basket**. Scotland's Baby Box has its own safer sleep information.

It's important that the cot or Moses basket is in the same room as the sober adult looking after the baby. Babies should always be in the same room as their carer for the first six months for sleep, day and night.

If families are staying away from home, it's a good idea to use a portable sleep space like a travel cot or carrycot.



Co-sleeping

Bedsharing needs to be discussed with all families who have young babies as any of them might fall asleep with their baby accidentally, even if they don't intend to. Babies can and do die in high-risk bed sharing situations.

It is very dangerous to bed share if either parent/carer in the bed has had any alcohol.

In these scenarios, it is always best to place the baby in their own sleep space, such as a cot or a Moses basket.

Any time parents are under the influence of drugs or alcohol or medication that affects their alertness, a sober adult should care for the baby. This should be discussed with all families so they can plan ahead and avoid unplanned risky situations.

Parents and carers should not bed share with their baby if:

- They or anyone in the bed has recently drunk any alcohol.
- They or their partner smokes or the baby was exposed to smoking in pregnancy.
- They have taken any drugs or medication that make them feel sleepy or affect their awareness.
- Their baby was born prematurely or weighed under 2.5kg or 5.5 pounds when they were born.



Sharing a sofa or armchair with a sleeping baby is particularly dangerous. The risk of SIDS is 50 times higher for babies when they sleep on a sofa or armchair with an adult. The baby is also at risk of accidental death as they can easily slip into a position where they are trapped and their airway is restricted and they can't breathe. You should advise families that any time they think they might fall asleep with their baby, they should place them on their back in a clear, safe space.

Breastfeeding

You might find it helpful to have conversations around breastfeeding with the families you work with:

- The risk of SIDS is halved in babies who are breastfed for at least two months, but any amount of breastfeeding has been shown to be protective against SIDS. However, it's important that families know that alcohol can be passed into breastmilk.
- If parents plan to drink alcohol, you could talk to them about choosing to perhaps express before they drink any alcohol and use this to feed their baby.
- Advise that expressing breastmilk will not increase the rate at which alcohol is removed from the milk. This is because the amount of alcohol in breastmilk will be the same level as the body.
- For more information on alcohol you can visit: [Alcohol - Healthy Living | NHS inform](#)



Alcohol intake

It might be helpful to discuss with families that all adults, not only those who are parents or breastfeeding, should not exceed 14 units of alcohol per week

You might find sharing these links with families helpful:

- You can find out more about how many units are in different drinks here: [How does my drinking add up | NHS inform](#).
- If families are worried about their alcohol intake or want to cut down, we advise that they speak to their GP who will be able to support them and provide further information.



Further resources:

If you want more information on safer sleep, please visit:

- [safer-sleep-babies-guide-professionals.pdf \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
- [Safer Sleep for babies a guide for parents and carers \(www.gov.scot\)](#)