



Safer Sleep from Day One: A Professionals' Guide

Safer Sleep advice to prevent 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 and messages 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 an estimated 29,000 babies' lives. Whilst SIDS is now thankfully rare, it is not uncommon, 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 so rare - now we need to implement what we have learnt from families with the most vulnerable infants and 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, credible source of advice and support and that families appreciate a conversation about safety that empowers them with information and advice to keep their baby safe.



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 e.g. If a baby who can roll sleeps on a soft mattress their face will push into the mattress and they won't be able to breathe. Explain the messages in a way that is clear and simple to understand and avoid speaking too clinically.

Continued on the next page...

Continued...

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.

A new report from Oxford, UCL, Bristol and Newcastle Universities on promoting safer sleep highlights the need for tailoring support to the circumstances of vulnerable families and the importance of establishing trusting relationships between those families and the professionals who work with them.

Key points



1

Are they aware of safer sleep – give resource 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: smoking in pregnancy, 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 e.g. premature babies' resource.

<https://www.lullabytrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-Lullaby-Trust-Safer-Sleep-Advice-For-Premature-Babies.pdf>

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 say this is a really important thing to think about as we know families will co-sleep without intending to, and make them aware of the high-risk situations that anyone can get into on any given night (e.g. drinking alcohol or being unwell).

5

Help families have a plan if they think they might intentionally or unintentionally co-sleep i.e., have the cot/Moses basket close by the bed; prepare the bed/room by removing or reducing adult bedding etc

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 being born.

6

Is there a history of sudden infant death in the family? These conversations may raise this – refer to CONI programme where appropriate and available

<https://www.lullabytrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/new-CONI-leaflet-2020-FINAL.pdf>

7

Give the family Safer Sleep from Day One – Safer Sleep for Expectant Parents booklet and Lullaby Trust website details.

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, and some things may take longer or need more support.

Consider families where parents/carers live apart. It is important that all parents/carers, including

grandparents are aware of safer sleep information.

NICE postnatal guidelines -
<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng194>

RCM guidance on safer sleep -
<https://www.rcm.org.uk/media/5713/safer-sleep-guidance.pdf>



SCAN ME