



Sleep Training for Infants: The Sleep Lady Shuffle

The Sleep Lady Shuffle is one of my most popular methods of choice because it allows you to be a comforting presence as your baby learns to put himself to sleep and back to sleep in his crib.

You start off by sitting next to your baby and you gradually move further and further away, weaning her off of your voice and presence to fall asleep by herself.

So here's how it works: once you have finished your bedtime routine and you gave your baby his last feed earlier on in the bedtime routine, you put your baby in the crib completely **awake**, pull up a chair and sit next to him until he falls asleep.

You want to be spending the vast majority of the time sitting in the chair quietly calming him with your voice and presence, but you may stroke or pat him intermittently if he fusses or cries if it helps calm him. Make sure that YOU are the one that controls the touch, so don't reward lots of crying with more touching and patting because that will encourage more crying. You want to make sure that you aren't stimulating him: bore him! You can close your eyes while sitting in the chair, which conveys the message that it's time to go to sleep. You are going to stay in the chair until he falls asleep. Repeat this for every night waking, unless it's time for him to eat, as per a night weaning strategy.

If your baby wakes up and it's time to eat according to your night weaning strategy, you can go ahead and feed your baby. But

when you see your baby slow down, break the latch or take the bottle out of your baby's mouth immediately, give him a burp (if necessary), and then place him back down into the crib **awake**.

Now, some of you might be thinking: "How am I going to stop my baby from falling asleep while eating?"

It's very important for you to pay close attention to the suckling. There's a VERY big difference between **active eating and pacifying**. If the baby is actively eating, you can see him gulping and swallowing repeatedly. When you begin to see your little one slow down, it means he's done eating and that you need to remove the breast or bottle from his mouth. Otherwise, he's going to be very confused as to why he's expected to fall back asleep on his own without assistance sometimes but not others.

By the 4th night of the Shuffle, the chair moves to the middle of the room. You can continue the soothing sounds but stay in the chair. If he gets really upset, you can get up to stroke or pat him as needed. Try not to pick him up unless he's really frantic - so if you need to, hold him until he's calmed down a bit but don't let him fall asleep in your arms. Continue to stay in the chair until he falls asleep. Repeat this for every subsequent night waking unless he wakes up and it's time for him to eat according to your nighttime eating schedule.

By nights 7 through 9, move the chair to the doorway inside his room. You should continue to be in his view. Continue the same soothing techniques and make sure to intervene as little as possible by this point. Again, if you are still feeding your baby at nighttime, make sure to ALWAYS put him back down completely **awake** after the feed. This is SO important!

By nights 10-12, move the chair into the hallway with the door open enough so that he can still see you. You can continue to make shh sounds intermittently from the hallway, not constantly, but enough to remind him that you are close by and responsive.

By night 13, move the chair to the hallway outside of his view, but close enough so that she can hear you. Again, you can make shh sounds intermittently to let her know you are there. If she cries, try checking on her from the bedroom door without going into the room. Continue to be calm and reassuring.

Your baby might have started falling asleep and staying asleep by nights 7-10. However, you might have to take one more step and leave her alone for 5-minute intervals. Keep checking on her from the bedroom door until she falls asleep. And if 5 minute intervals are too brief, use 10-15 minute intervals. Make sure the checks themselves are very brief- no more than 10 seconds long - and that you are responding in the exact same way at each check.

You want to take away the element of surprise so that your baby doesn't stay up longer to see how he gets responded to next!

So here are some very important tips for executing the Shuffle:

1. Remember that the purpose of you sitting on the chair next to your baby is NOT to stop the crying. **He is going to cry** and that's okay! You are there to provide him with the emotional support he needs to get through this learning experience.
2. Remember to gradually decrease the amount of soothing and interaction over time.
3. If your baby takes a pacifier, do not place it back in his mouth if it falls out. He needs to learn to either replace it on his own or learn to fall asleep without it. If you are replacing it for him, the pacifier becomes, by sheer definition, a sleep crutch, so you really want to avoid doing this. If your baby stands a chance of getting the pacifier into his mouth by himself, feel free to sprinkle a handful of pacifiers all over the crib so that he can easily retrieve one. If your baby is not capable of replacing the pacifier whatsoever, it might be better to place the baby in the crib without it.

4. If your baby rolls onto her tummy, do not roll her back immediately. Refer to the module on developmental milestones where I discuss rolling in more detail, but generally speaking, you want to avoid rolling her back every single time because it'll quickly turn into a game for her.
5. Same thing goes if your baby stands up in the crib - don't lie her back down immediately because you're going to get a Jack in the Box on your hands. If she can sit back down by herself, I wouldn't lie her down at all. Let her do that by herself.
6. Remember that you're spending the vast majority of the time sitting in the chair quietly, so you're interacting or engaging minimally.
7. When your baby wakes up at night, always go straight to the chair until he falls back asleep. Don't go directly to the crib to soothe your baby for even a few seconds as THAT is going to reward the wakeup and encourage your baby to wake again!
8. If your baby is eating at nighttime, put him back down **AWAKE** after the feed. Don't allow your baby to pacify himself during that feed because it takes away from his ability to learn to self soothe, and THAT is going to cause further unnecessary night wakings.
9. If he wakes up before 6:00am, treat that as a night waking and return back to the chair. The last thing you want is for him to get used to waking at 5am for the day. So avoid setting his internal alarm clock for so early and keep him in his crib until at least 6am.

Now let's say that your baby wakes up at 5:30am and he doesn't fall back asleep, and it's now 6:00am. Here's what you want to do: leave the room for about 30 seconds or so, come back in, turn on the lights and give him a BIG good morning. You want to send the message to your baby that you're coming to get him because it's morning, not because he's just been crying for the last 30

minutes. The next thing you want to do is go to your baby's crib and try to calm her down a notch or 2 with your voice and with your presence. Don't pick her up if she's hysterical - **we want to be rewarding a calm baby**, not a hysterical one. She doesn't need to stop crying completely, but she needs to calm down a bit before you get her from the crib. We want the baby to learn to be content in her crib so that she can relax and eventually learn to roll over and go back to sleep.

This is very, very important here everyone: **always reward the calm, don't reward hysterics!** When it's finally morning, avoid feeding your baby for at least 2 minutes. You don't want to be rewarding crying or whining with food. At the end of the day, your baby isn't a starving newborn baby who needs to eat right away, so try changing him first and THEN feed him.

10) Now if your baby starts throwing his stuffed animals out of the crib out of sheer frustration or to get your attention, only return them once. Wait until your baby is lying down before returning them. Otherwise, it'll turn into a game where he throws the object out of the crib, you return it, and then he throws it out again in order to engage you. Avoid that power struggle completely since you can't win.

11) If your baby becomes hysterical, feel free to pick him up to calm him, but make sure the pickups are **intermittent**. If you need some guidance as to how often to pick up, I recommend using Ferber's timings as a guide. So for example, if your baby is hysterical on the first night of sleep training, you can pick him up after 3 minutes of crying, then again after 5 minutes of crying, then again after 10 minutes of crying, and then every subsequent 10 minutes until he calms down a bit

And of course, remain 1000% consistent! Otherwise, this all might not work! Don't start and stop and do NOT revert back to previous

steps of the Shuffle unless your baby gets sick and you need to put things on hold. Some parents find that the baby cries more when they move to the next position, so they cave and move back to the closer position. Don't do that! It's very normal for a baby to protest more when you move to the next position, and the last thing you want to do is reward your baby's hysterics! If your baby learns that crying really hard will get you to move closer to him, it's only going to encourage MORE hysterics. So regardless of how your baby responds, stay in your Shuffle position until he falls asleep.