



Transitioning from Co-Sleeping

Co-sleeping is definitely one of those hot-button topics. Some families choose to co-sleep because it resonates most with their parenting philosophy. Other families resort to co-sleeping out of desperation: either it's the only way that the baby or toddler will sleep, or it makes the night wakings slightly more bearable when you don't need to get out of bed.

So before deciding whether or not you should end co-sleeping, let's go through the pros and cons.

Let's discuss the pros of co-sleeping first:

1. Some families actually sleep better and really enjoy it! So if you are currently co-sleeping and everyone is getting the sleep that they need, you don't need to change a darn thing. When you decide that it's no longer working for you, then you can transition your child out of your bed.
2. If you have a young baby who is still eating frequently at night, it can make night feeds easier for nursing moms. For this reason, some families choose to co-sleep for the first few months and then get the baby into the crib or bassinet when he's no longer nursing every 2-3 hours at night.
3. Co-sleeping allows for nighttime bonding between the parent and the child. This is especially relevant during times of crisis or trauma because it can provide the child with the closeness that he needs. So if you're going through a separation, or there's been a death in the family, or the baby

has experienced some other trauma, temporarily co-sleeping with him might be the best thing you can do for his emotional well-being, as well as yours.

Now, onto the cons of co-sleeping:

1. Many families resort to co-sleeping out of sheer desperation, not because they actually want to co-sleep. They long to have their bed to themselves, but don't see a way out!
2. Many families don't sleep better with their child next to them. Either they're worried about rolling on top of the baby or they're constantly awoken by the toddler's movements and sounds. Overall, the quality of sleep they get isn't good.
3. Conversely, some babies and toddlers sleep worse next to their parents! Sometimes the proximity can be distracting and cause unnecessary night wakings. For older babies and toddlers who are still nursing, they might wake up to nurse not because they're hungry but because mom's breasts are RIGHT THERE. How can they say no to an all you can eat buffet?

If you've decided that you're ready to transition your child out of co-sleeping, here's what you need to do:

Firstly, get the child's bedroom ready. Get a crib, pack 'n play, or bed for the child and move it into a separate room. If your child is under the age of 3, keep her in a crib- trust me on this one! You can review the module on transitioning to a bed for more information on this topic. Also, review the module on optimal sleep environments to make sure that your child's new room fits the criteria for an optimal sleep environment.

If your child is old enough to understand what's going on, really try to hype up this exciting change. Take him to the store with you and let him pick out his own sheets and pillow. Make sure you talk a lot about this transition with your child so that he's prepared and ready for everything.

If you don't have an additional room for your baby or toddler to sleep in and he needs to share a room with you, I recommend purchasing a room divider so that you can create a room within a room. This is very important if you have an older baby in your room who knows how to sit up on his own. Your presence could become a distraction at nighttime and cause unnecessary night wakings.

Here's a personal story to demonstrate this necessity:

When my older daughter was 18 months, we slept at my in-laws over a holiday. We decided that we'd all sleep in this big bedroom in my in-laws basement - it never occurred to be that it would be a problem. She was a GREAT sleeper at the time.

Anyways, she went to bed no problem. She woke up around 3am, stood up in her pack 'n play, stared at us, and didn't know what to do with herself. We tried to settle her by lying her back down, tucking her back in, but she wouldn't settle! She kept standing right back up to look at us! We even found ourselves hiding under our blankets, hoping that she'd forget about us and go back to sleep. But of course, she was 18 months at the time and knew darn well that we were hiding. We even tried giving her a bottle, we tried rocking her, and nothing was working to get her to go back to sleep.

At this point, it was probably about 4:30am and she still hadn't gone back to sleep. So out of sheer desperation, we took the pack 'n play and put it in my mother-in-law's basement kitchen. We plunked her in the pack 'n play, said goodnight, and left the room. She screamed for about two minutes and then went right back to sleep. Moving forward, whenever we slept at my inlaws, we always made sure that she'd have her own sleep space and we never had this problem.

The moral of the story here is that sharing a room with a child in this age range can cause huge disruptions in the sleep department. See, an older baby or toddler isn't mature enough to

think to themselves “I see Mommy/Daddy, but I should really roll over and go back to sleep”. There’s no reasoning with a child this age! Once your baby is old enough to sit up on their own, this is when these sleep problems start happening. Take this anecdote as a lesson: **don’t bother trying to make big changes in the sleep department if you have an older baby sharing a room with you who is able to see you from their crib.**

Next, make sure to incorporate regular playtime in the child’s room and crib or bed. This helps him develop positive associations with his new sleep space, which is essential. We can’t expect him to fall asleep in an environment that he isn’t comfortable in. You don’t need to be playing in his room all day long—10 minutes here and 10 minutes there will do the trick. Remember, your child has never slept in a crib or bed before so he needs to familiarize himself with this new environment.

Thirdly, this is the right time to introduce a transitional object if you haven’t already done so. It’s essential for the baby to have a source of comfort at nighttime, other than you. Remember, when you were co-sleeping, YOU were likely her source of comfort at nighttime. Don’t worry if she doesn’t bond with a lovey right away—she might not bond with something until she is weaned off of her current sleep association. Right now, if your baby is nursing to sleep and in your bed all night long, she likely doesn’t have room for comfort from something else, so just give it some time. One thing you can do to encourage the bond is to wedge the lovey between the two of you when feeding her. If you are nursing, you can wear it in your shirt so that it gets your scent. Also, please refer to the emotional well-being module on loveys for additional advice.

Next, I recommend to begin co-sleeping with her in her new room. So put a mattress on the floor and prepare to help her get used to sleeping in this new environment. This step helps build a bridge

between the family bed and her own sleep space. You only need to do this for 2-3 nights for your child to adjust to this new room.

The last step of this transition is to actually teach him how to fall asleep on his own. Review the different sleep training approaches and pick one that you're most comfortable with. I typically start off with the Shuffle or Pick Up/Put Down for babies who have been co-sleeping. If you're transitioning a toddler to his own sleep space, I always move onto the Shuffle after this step. These approaches allow you to be in the room and gradually withdraw from the crib or bed, which is almost always the best fit for children because they're used to you being **RIGHT THERE** and are probably comforted by your presence.