

CULTURALLY SENSITIVE SLEEP CONVERSATIONS

Rates of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) have declined dramatically over the past 20 years, thanks in large part to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) “Safe Sleep” campaign – a set of sleep recommendations that minimize risk of infant suffocation and other sleep hazards. Black and Latinx populations experience higher rates of SIDS relative to White populations. This is likely due to systemic barriers related to practicing safe sleep. Groups more likely to experience higher rates of SIDS may also be managing other barriers, including health literacy, access, and education.

The AAP recommends that infants sleep:

- ✓ on their backs
- ✓ on a firm surface
- ✓ without anything in their sleep area
- ✓ in a shared a room with caregivers on a separate sleep surface
- ✓ in a cool space or dressed to prevent overheating

SET THE STAGE FOR CULTURALLY SENSITIVE SLEEP CONVERSATIONS

Caregivers and providers both want babies to thrive. But it can be difficult to find common ground for supportive and effective conversations. Here are some strategies to keep in mind:

Recognize ways in which your values and priorities may differ from those of the families you work with.

Approach the conversation with openness, avoiding any judgment.

Highlight any ways in which the family is practicing safe sleep efforts and reinforce their efforts. Encourage them to keep it up!

Address safe sleep disparities. Help families understand the AAP recommendations and explain why they matter. Connect families with material supports and services that may be helpful.

Highlight your goal of working together to determine a sleeping arrangement that is both safe and aligns with the family’s background and needs.

Strive for improvement rather than perfection. The safest sleep may be different for different families, and you can brainstorm ways to reduce – rather than eliminate – risk. Work with what families are willing to do.

Check in after the conversation. Ask how the changes are working, and continue to offer support.



WHEN DISCUSSING SAFE SLEEP, MEET FAMILIES WHERE THEY ARE

Clear and supportive conversations with pediatric health care workers are essential to promoting the AAP safe sleep practices. When discussing sleep, consider the family's situation in its entirety. Below are a few ways in which a family's situation might make practicing safe sleep difficult

Cultural values

- Bedsharing might be a normal practice in some cultures, while others might value placing infants to sleep in their own rooms.

Caregiving norms

- Caregiving styles emphasizing nighttime responsiveness may encourage bedsharing.
- Bedsharing can promote and extend breastfeeding, which is important to many families.
- Many working caregivers resort to bedsharing due to the impact of sleep deprivation on work performance.

Resources

- Financial resources are needed to purchase or create separate sleep areas for infants.
- Educational background and literacy skills are needed to understand written safe sleep materials.

Individual infant needs

- Infant characteristics (e.g., temperament, prematurity, health) all influence a child's quality of sleep and the degree of caregiver support needed for sleep.
- Caregivers may be more likely to bedshare, whether intentionally or unintentionally, when infants need more support falling back to sleep.

Judgement, shame, and fear

- When families feel judged for their sleeping choices, they avoid asking important questions and sharing information with providers. This makes it difficult to get information and support.
- Caregivers may not speak up about substance use problems due to fear that their child will be removed from their care.
- Caregivers with limited resources may avoid important conversations with providers due to shame around their ability to provide for their child.
- Caregivers with lower education or literacy levels may hesitate to voice misunderstandings.

Approaching all families with warmth, collaboration, and support is key!

For a full list of references, please visit:
<https://dpcb.ucla.edu/culturally-sensitive-sleep-conversations/>

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Generously supported by

Tikun Olam Foundation of the
JEWISH COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF LOS ANGELES

