

Babies Most Common Sleep Challenges - Sense by Meg

Tove 0:12

Welcome to sense by Meg Faure the podcast that helps parents make sense of the early years of parenting. I'm your host Tove Gant, a mom of three and an avid sense fan. Today, we are going to unpack the top sleep questions, which I think every parent under the sun wants to delve into. We are going to move through these as quickly as we can make because you know, there's always a good bunch of sleeping questions that mums have to ask. So I am going to start by asking playing in the newborn space, because let's start from scratch.

So how much sleep should parent expect newborn to get? And what is the kind of typical sleep pattern bearing in mind that obviously, the first three months is a bit chaotic?

What is the kind of sleep pattern a new parent can expect to see with their baby?

Meg 1:01

Thanks, Tove. Yeah, am super excited to be on this with you as the host, again, that first question around newborn sleep.

So first of all, I think parents need to expect that the little one will sleep quite a bit during the day, and particularly the very newborn days actually sleep a lot more than we think they will. And it kind of eases us in quite nicely. But they also feed very, very regularly. So you're almost actually in a 24 hour space, you literally only feeding because a feed will take 40 minutes. And sleeping is for very long stretches.

Now, a couple of things around that. One is that if your baby's sleeping more than four hourly for more than four hours in the day, you must wake them. So we want to establish that they actually wake up more frequently in the day than they do at night.

So wake your baby by three hours so that they can feed. And then as long as your baby's gaining weight, you can actually let them stretch at night, they can sleep for as long as they want between feeds as long as they're gaining weight. And that usually will mean so here's your expectation, your baby will wake three hourly to four hourly at night in the first couple of weeks.

And then one of those stretches will become longer four to five hours, by about six weeks, you'll have a good five hour stretch from putting them down in the evening, like at seven o'clock, all the way through until like 12. So you'll get one long stretch, and then you bet three early feeds at night

Tove 2:15

Is that the norm is that what we striving for? Is that kind of the norm because I can tell you right now my baby, Like there was alot more than that.

Meg 2:21

In the very early days, the first two weeks, they actually probably won't. And in fact, I do remember your babies. The first two weeks they're in the newborn stage. Yep, you've gotten that honeymoon phase because the rest is also gritty. But in the early days, that is what you expect at about two weeks old, 10 days to 14 days old. Then your baby starts to wake up more frequently.

Tove 1 2:46

Okay. The most common sleep challenges, what are the most common sleep challenges faced with infants? And how can we address them effectively.

Meg 2:54

So I think the most common sleep challenge is by far that a baby doesn't learn to self soothe, so they are breastfeeding to sleep or being rocked to sleep or being held to sleep contact napping. So that is by far the most common, sleep challenge.

I would say that in the very early days, you would expect actually to be supporting your baby and not expecting them to self soothe up until at 17 weeks, babies really don't self soothe. So you having to do a lot of support. But certainly from 12 weeks from 17 weeks onwards, they actually do need to learn to self soothe. So our biggest challenge, I would say is the self-soothing challenge.

If I had to think about the very early days, the biggest sleep challenge is day night sleep reversal, which I've already alluded to. So that's that they're feeding more often at night than they are during the day. So you need to switch that around. And then in the toddler years, the most common sleep challenge is behavioral stuff, like I'm just going to flex my muscles and walk through every night or ask for 10 Apples before I go to sleep or need to go to the toilet just after you've walked out the room. Those are all the things that come up, it's behavioral.

Tove 3:55

And can I ask I know dummies within my social circle dummies were a big problem until baby could obviously learn to put the dummy in their mouth, they got attached to the dummy help them soothe and then the dummy just kept falling out. And so moms spend 80% of their night getting up and down and up and down putting the dummy in a mouth. What do we do there?

Meg 4:11

Yeah, so that's dummy patrol. And that's associated with that kind of first thing, which is a self-soothing. So up until about six months old babies actually can't control dummies themselves. So you can't expect them to be putting them in their mouths. So you will be expected to dummy patrol. In other words, you're going to be getting up and putting the dummy back in.

So you need to expect that. So you can either get rid of the dummy completely, which is one strategy or the other strategy is, Keep the dummy, but then what you're going to be helping a little one to do is to learn to actually put that in, which is one strategy, or the other strategy is keep the dummy, but then what you're going to be helping a little one to do is to learn to actually put that dummy in themselves, which will happen between about seven and eight months.

Tove 4:50

Okay, all right. So maybe I know there's a lot of myths around you know, you should never wake a baby. I guess one of the big questions is, is there ever a really good time to wake a baby Eat, whether it's feeding or improving sleep or dream feed or anything like that.

Meg 5:04

Yeah, so I'm not a big fan of dream feeds. And the reason for that is that babies often don't actually feed terribly well at that dream feed. So that's kind of sticking the bottle in the mouth at 10 o'clock at night, or trying to wake them at 10 o'clock at night, so that you don't have to feed again to, it might avoid you having to get up at two. But what ends up happening is either your baby doesn't feed well and then has to wake up later anyway.

But the most important thing is that it often ends up causing habits that you don't need. So then when you don't want to do the dream feed, they've got into such a cycle of doing the 10 o'clock feed that they wake up for it. So I don't believe in waking babies. And actually, my general rule of thumb is never wake a sleeping baby like sleep is king, don't wake your baby, there is one circumstance in which I do recommend wake your baby. And that is if your sleep time in the afternoon, is going to interfere with your bedtime at night.

Now, that happens at a couple of ages. First of all, all the way through your last sleep of the day, your baby will need to be working from it. If the awake time between the last sleep and the bedtime that you want to put your baby down is too short, you're so then you will be waking your baby. So that's the one circumstance and the other circumstances in the toddler years sometimes toddlers are only on one sleep. So let's say it's from 12 o'clock. And then they're waking up at like two o'clock. They're having a nice long midday sleep 12 Until two and then they start waking in the super early morning, like for 430 in the morning, then I do recommend waking from that afternoon sleep to make it a little shorter.

So it again, it's a similar principle just that afternoon sleeps that last afternoon sleep of the day or the midday sleep in an older baby. Sometimes they need to be working from.

Tove 6:42

Okay, yeah, we definitely woke up all the kids on that kind of what do they call it? Like the danger nap? Yeah, because they all kind of needed that 20 minute nap because the nap before was too short. And you had to wake them up at the end.

Meg 6:53

And the app actually does that for you. So in the parents sense app, the last sleep of the day, you're actually told what time to wake your baby up from it. So if you watch that, it'll say to you 4.45 Wake your baby or whatever.

Tove 7:03

It's a game changer. Okay, sleep regressions every parent's absolute nightmare. I feel like I'm going through one now. They super frustrating. Can you explain what a sleep regression is? Why do we have them? How do we cope with them? How do we get out the other side with our sanity intact? And how long do they last for because I feel like they did the end do sleep

Meg 7:25

Progressions are just such a challenge. And the three classic ages that they happen at the one is around about 17 weeks, that's 17 weeks, the progression is pretty Hallmark, that's around about four months. The next one that happens is somewhere between about eight and 10 months. And I don't know if it's Nova you are talking about. But if she's the one having the sleep progression, then is potentially that ,that's the progression. And then the third sleep progression happens in the toddler years, and somebody I spoke to once called them sleep progressions, because there actually are problems that need to be solved in order for the next step to kind of be solved and take it from there.

So your 17 week sleep progression, if you want to call it that is often related to either needing extra nutrition, so it signals to your body right to produce a bit more milk because you've got an hour give me an extra feed at night.

So usually what's happened is your baby's dropped to only one or maybe two night feeds in the early parts of the morning. And now suddenly, they're pulled back to night feed just before midnight, which is like a killer, because like you can just see the light at the end of the tunnel and not standing away. And so that's a real killer, but that one is often due to nutritional needs.

And so your options there is either to feed more, more milk feeds or to introduce solids, but it is also related to the stage at which little ones need to learn to self soothe.

So if you tick those two boxes there, which is the nutrition and the self soothing at that age, you will have tick them for the long term. So that's why it's a progression that moves us into a new space.

The next one, which is that kind of eight to 10 month one is often around the developmental stage of separation anxiety, that they are now developing a little personality, they don't want you out of their sight.

So they wake up at night just to check that you still there, they're developing an awareness that actually maybe you still exist when you're not with them. And so they're gonna call you back. So then you're going to play all your separation games. So that's an emotional progression.

And then your third one is, of course in the toddler years. And that's often related to language explosion and nightmares. And I know Jagger's starting with his language

explosion. And so he could be the one who starts with sleep progression in terms of nightmares at night, because as soon as language comes up, then those nightmares come.

Tove 9:30

So how do you distinguish the difference between that kind of sleep progression because there's nightmares and like sleeping badly, because they need to transition from a cot to a bed as an example, because that also kind of happens around the toddler years, right? But those two kind of very much coincide.

Meg 9:44

Yeah, So I would definitely deal with the cot one quite quickly, because it's just such an up in the bad luck. It's one of those quick fixes. There's a couple of sleep hacks that I can tell you about that are just super quick fixes. That's one of them. It happens in about 24 months. And I know Jagger is too so it'd be time to move in from a cot into a bed. So that definitely could and I would do that ahead of starting to think about nightmares. And then the nightmare ones actually also quite a quick fix, because what you just need to do there is pop a nightlight on in the room cut out TV in the late afternoon, and then just deal with it. Because you know, they'll wake up, they'll have a nightmare. You tell them they're okay. And they go back to sleep.

Tove 10:20

Okay, interesting. Oh, I could get on like a whole path of Jagger in the room and coming in and out the room. But I feel like I'm gonna digress. So I'm going to keep us on to the question

Meg 10:27

that sleep questions?

Tove 10:31 :

Yes, the top sleep questions, not the Tovey parenting. I know, co sleeping is a big question amongst parents. And I think that one of the big things is distinguishing the difference between co sleeping and room sharing. I think that's probably the first question that I guess I'd like you to unpack. And then how do we do both safely and really kind of understanding the differences and the pros and cons?

Meg 10:56

You know, I love using co-sleeping as an illustration for the way that I think about most parenting questions. And that is that even in the most thorny of questions, even the most controversial and co-sleeping is a controversial one. I think that there is space for everybody to have their own airtime.

And just illustrating how controversial co sleeping is, is that there are some countries in the world like the UK where they advocate co sleeping very strongly for attachment parenting and for bonding and for breastfeeding, and the other countries in the world like America where it's like tantamount to giving your baby a razor blade, you know.

So, like, there's such different polarized views. I am very much of the view that both strategies can actually work very, very well for babies.

So let's just debunk it and just have a look at it. Yeah, so first of all room sharing. Almost nobody is that's not controversial. Almost nobody has any controversy around that room sharing is absolutely fine. Many, many parents globally have to do it. They don't have a choice. I remember doing a talk in New York City a few years ago. And none of the moms had a be a room for their babies separate.

They all because their apartments are small and they had other children in the other room. So baby was in the room, room sharing perfect, you can do it in their own cot or in a co sleeper crib. So that's not controversial. Co sleeping which is baby in your bed on your mattress with your bedding is controversial. And in my mind, it does have benefits that are well researched things like it does promote breastfeeding, it does increase the length of time that a mom breastfeed her baby. And it is absolutely wonderful for many moms and babies. It just feels right. It's instinctive. The problem is that it does carry risks. And so if you are going to co sleep and the jury is not out on this, there's a lot of research that shows that co sleeping unsafely is very, very unwise. And so you need to give your baby their own space in your bed, which means that you might want to nest around them, you're going to want to have none of your bedding in anywhere near them, you're going to want to make sure that you're co sleeping in a bed, not on a couch, no pillows near them. So you're going to really do it super safely. So it doesn't have to be controversial, but it does have to be done safely.

Tove 13:50

So can I ask I feel like recently those DACA tops, which were like everything that everyone needed to use at one stage have now become a bit of a controversial piece as well. Yeah,

Meg 14:01

so the darker parts have actually always been controversial. They went on a Fed, so everybody was keen on having them because they're meant to be part of the fad.

Having said that, they really do have benefits. And so one of them and I'm gonna go through the benefits of a duck a title Sleepyhead they call lots of different names, the nurture one cushion, the benefits are that they give your baby a little bit of a feeling of kind of containment, like the womb, so I love that like they can wedge against it, they can put the head up against it, they can put their back against it against that little age, and so it makes them feel more content.

I certainly used to nurture one cushion for my youngest baby because it was out by then. And if docket had been not bad then I probably would have used one as well. So yes, lots and lots of positive reasons for them.

The negatives are and obviously What's also nice about them is that you can put them down in their own caught within that or if you're co sleeping they can co sleep in their own space. If you go to your mum and you need to put your newborn down at your mom's house in the evening, you can use it moves around, it's much easier to move than a whole camp cot.

So there are reasons for it. But there are also other reasons and this came from America where they've really pushed for us not having anything inside cots with babies, no kind of loose cushions or anything in the cots show. And they they said it's the risk of suffocation if the baby moves their head into it if they can't turn over in it, or if they're rolling and actually roll under it. So it's one of those parenting things and one of those tools that you need to be sensible about using you know me well enough to know that I normally don't just chuck anything out. So I kind of like them. But at the same time, they need to be used carefully.

Tove 15:36

Yeah, I loved ,we travelled a lot of hours and putting them on the plane in the bassinet in the plane, but in their own little place just made the sleeping elsewhere, like much easier to sleep

Meg 15:48

They're more than just a fad. I mean, when I say they're just a fad, they've been made fashionable, but I actually think that they do have great application, but the controversy around using them has always been there.

Tove 15:59

Okay, so transitioning from a crib to a bed, which we now started unpacking. But I guess what we haven't looked at because we just jumped in the middle of it was what are the signs that a child is ready to move? And how to not this is what I'm wondering how should a parent manage it?

Because actually, today's the day Jagger moves to be? Well, he was supposed to be until we were wedged in by trees, and I wanted to get my bolt for the door. Now I don't have a bolt and I don't think I can do it. Yeah. So what should parents be looking for? And how do we manage that transition?

Meg 16:29

Okay, all right, I'm sorry that you reached in batteries. For context, everybody, there was a massive storm on our island. And so some trees have waged Tovey into her home with three children under the age of five. And I don't know who's in danger, her or the children but it's a dangerous situation, it's hectic to be wedged in.

So let's talk I've been talking about wedged in, let's talk about toddlers and cots. So cots are fabulous, because they are a forced boundary similar to your trees that have fallen down. And that keeping you in the cot does that which is really important in little human brains, because little Humans do not have the ability to self-regulate behaviour.

In other words, you can't say to a 14 month old, it's time for bed, you need to stand your cot that that boundary that language is lost on them so that there is no boundary. So the concept

of having a safe boundary where they can just wander at night where they are safe, where they are content is the right way to go. So we keep them there for as long as possible until such time as they are able to understand boundaries. And that happens once language really is quite well established.

So my rule of thumb age for this is 24 months or two years old. Before that time, keep them in, keep the boundaries in. And after that time, hopefully, your little one has sufficient understanding of language to be able to self start to self regulate their behaviour, so that you can say it's doodoos time now you are staying in your bed, I know you want to come out, you are staying in your bed and you can start to give boundaries.

So that's the first thing. The second thing is that in terms of the signs that your baby's ready, so they've got language, their understanding, and in the main sign is that they start to climb over the edge of the cot. And when they do that they're dangerous, they could fall, then you're obviously gonna move them to bed. And then also for some little ones, they don't ever show that. But they start to sleep really poorly, because they're actually bumping up against the cot. And it's actually starting to disrupt their sleep. So they might get like a toe caught in the cot bars or whatever. And so then they're wanting to move, and then when you move them into bed, they just do sleep a whole lot better.

Tove 18:26

Sure. And how do you prevent them? Like escaping? I mean, where's the like, what's the escape plan? I feel like I have to baby proof the whole downstairs of my house. Because, you know, with Gray, we never had that because she from a safety perspective. We kept her in a room the entire time. But now I'm like, what if we wake up in the middle of the night and eat in the kitchen having tea like

Meg 18:49

Okay, so just a couple of principles, the one that you've actually mentioned is that I do like latches. Now latches do not close the door completely they keep the door ajar of about five centimeters or less, and but it's a little hook and eye that you put onto your doors and it keeps it open. So if they do get out in the middle of the night, then they will call for you obviously and you will go to them, you know, barring them in there to keep them apart from you.

But it just means that they're not then able to disappear, like you say down into the kitchen or go into the guest room and stick their head in the toilet or anything. So you are keeping them in that space. And what's very, very interesting is that with all three of mine, and I know that doesn't make it the rule, but certainly many children don't actually try. They're kind of in bed, they were used to the boundaries of the bars.

You put them in bed, you have a little cot railing next to them or you can make a little cot bumper space. Yeah. And they actually just don't get out like you put them to bed you say good night, and then they just think they have to stay there because that's what they've always done you will get the ones who don't quite do that and who will probably walk down the passage and then you can just use the little latch on the door and it also if they do come down the passage. So let's say you don't have the latch, they come down the passage, then you're going to need to pick how you respond and be super consistent. So the one response is, you always just take them back to their bed. So, you know, as exhausting it is as a month, right,

you're coming back to bed, I'm taking you back, you're walking back every time. And they will eventually stop bothering because they don't want to be walked back every time.

Another option is to bring them into your bed, if you're a co sleeping family. And of course, at this age, there's no more risk of SIDS. So that's absolutely fine if you can tolerate a little human body in your bed. And then and if you want a family bed, which is fine. And then the third option, which is the sensible middle ground, I always call it is to actually have a little mat, like a little yoga mat, maybe three or five centimeters tucked under your bed. And when they come through the middle of the night, you pull it out, and they can just sleep there next to you until the morning.

Tovey 20:41

Okay, so you recommend putting that latch on the overnight as well, if you wanted to? Or would you say that at night, that's just not part of the sleep training to get them back into their bed.

Meg 20:58

you can actually do it at night as a safety precaution you can open and they can as well leave the door open, don't close the door, you just leave the door ajar with its little lock on it. And it's absolutely fine. And then they can just call for you. In fact, my kids never really in the early days, when they were super little. They never walked through anyway, they would lie in the bed and just call for me. And obviously I would go to them immediately. But it just contains them if you are worried about their safety, particularly I know your house was good staircases and you know you..

Tove 21:19

Yeah, just baby proofing like everything downstairs now because I was like he's going to start walking around. So it's nice to know that can I leave that on overnight? That makes me feel better.

Meg 21.28

As long as you can obviously hear him you've got a monitor. So you can monitor him.

Tove 21:34

Nightmares and night terrors. Now, I know that a lot of parents struggle to distinguish between the two. So maybe we can start by just unpacking what the difference is between a nightmare and a night terror. And then I get particularly children prone to it. Is there anything we can do to soothe our kids or manage help manage our kids through this process when they're having one?

Meg 21:53

Yeah, so look, I mean, nightmares and night terrors. So usually a nightmare is an imagination based fear. So they will actually be able to talk through what they've been feeling. And they will be pointing at the door and going mommy, there's something there or pointing or looking

terrified. So it's a lot more around imagination. Whereas night terrors, your little one is fast asleep still.

So you walk into the room, they are screaming blue murder, you think maybe they've been murdered, and when you walk in, they are fast asleep, and the eyes maybe awake or closed, but open or closed. But they are not conscious. They are just screaming and nightmares are super scary as parents because it's like, oh my gosh, like are they possessed like what is going on? Night terrors are usually related to over tiredness. So it's almost it's not a seizure.

But it's almost like a little bit of a brain, like a brain trigger. And it's usually triggered by over tiredness. So it'll often happen in those cusp ages entirely in the toddler years when you have dropped today sleep. So let's say they're 14 months old and you've dropped the late afternoon sleep or you've dropped the morning sleep and they just having that one midday sleep. They might even have night terrors, if they are super overtired at very overstimulated have had a very busy Saturday afternoon.

They might do it on that sort of night. So that's what a nightmare is a nightmare. They will actually be able to articulate, they're awake, they're holding on to they're terrified. They're saying, look, look, there it is just crying and holding on to with fear.

There's more fear associated there. It's like a conscious fear handled him quite differently. So your night terrors are best handled with deep pressure or just presence.

So pressure and presence are your two Ps for night terrors, you're just going to sit with them, you're going to put your hand on them, or you're just going to just sit with them, because you don't try and wake them up definitely do not wake a baby during a nightmare. And they will start to sob and then fall back asleep and it'll be over and they won't remember it and nightmare is totally different.

You're going to turn the lights on put the nightlight on, hold them cuddle them talk through what they saw, tell them that it wasn't real turn on the light and show them that it was a dressing gown on the back of the door or whatever it was. So you know it's handled completely differently both handled with compassion. The one you waking them up when they are awake and you handling it more consciously. The other one you just handling with your presence

Tove 24:07

Is there a behavioural piece to nightmares like is there you know your toddler starts getting savvy enough in his like, when I say that there's a monster in my bed my mom comes through and gives me a cuddle like is that a thing? Or can we generally distinguish the difference between?

Meg 24:23

I would say yes, it probably would be because anytime you feed the monster the monster wake up. So yes, it could be but having said that I am one foot going in with compassion always. Even if they've woken up and they are calling you back telling you that there's a nightmare. Let's say it isn't a nightmare. They're still woken up they still need you. So it's still handled with compassionate so I know it's scary. You can sleep on mommy's floor if

you want or you can sleep your mummy will sit next to you until you're asleep. It's that sort of thing. I think this is the gritty part of parenting. It's hard. It's exhausting hours sleep too but you know you have to handle these all with compassion and they do pass and you know it isn't just a time I'm of your life.

Tove 25:01

Okay, Meg? Well, I think we've hit our time limits. Unfortunately, I still have a few more questions. But we'll have to unpack that in another episode.

Meg 25:10

Yeah, it's been super interesting. I've really loved this, because we've kind of almost done it like rapid fire. We haven't stuck to a theme, other than, of course, the sleep theme. But it's been really interesting to go through and debunk a lot of the myths and then deal with a lot of the questions. So thank you very much for being with me.

Tove 25:24

Thank you for tuning in. Thank you for having me, allowing me to host it. And thank you for joining us Meg.

Meg 25:31

Yes, absolutely, and Tovey, I do want to mention if moms have loved this platform of you kind of firing questions at me and they are wanting to fire questions as well, I'd like to let you know about a new product that we have inside of our app, which is called Aiah, and she is a chatbot, who has been trained entirely on all my content.

So every single one of your questions that you've asked me today, to me, if I had plugged that into Aiah, who's inside our parents sense app, she would have actually given me the same answers that I've given you today. So moms, if you are looking for a way to be able to access all of my knowledge, and to be able to just ask me questions on the fly, when I'm not in your bedroom, and not chatting with you, and not in your ears, then pop onto the parents sense app and have a look at the little Chatbot. She's available in there, and she will then be able to answer all of your questions.

Tove 26:24

Thank you so much make Meg. Thanks everyone for listening. Until next time, we'll chat to you soon

Meg 26:31

Chat soon.