

PEDAGOGICAL INPUT

for the adventure of family life



11_Babies do not like to sleep alone

The good news first: There is nothing wrong with you or your baby if it cannot fall asleep on its own and is calling for you. There is nothing wrong with you or your baby if it keeps waking up and calling for you or is hungry in the first three years of life.

Beware of sleep training

Not being able to fall asleep alone and not being able to stay asleep are sensible behaviours that every baby around the world has brought with it since the dawn of mankind. It is precisely this behaviour that has allowed the human race to survive. This sensible behaviour should not be changed with sleep training and controlled screaming. If parents consciously let their baby cry, this causes a lot of stress in the child. If left alone, it will actually stop crying at some point, not because it has learned to fall asleep relaxed, but because it has resigned and given up. This experience is very painful for a baby, because it learns: "I am alone and abandoned. No one comforts me when I'm scared."

Children pay a high price for such behavioural training. Their healthy psychological development and self-esteem can be seriously damaged. Young children cannot soothe and comfort themselves on their own, they need the protection and comfort of an adult. The stress system of babies and small children can only be calmed down through loving attention and warm physical contact or understanding words. Left alone in need, overwhelming feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, loneliness, and being abandoned arise, which can remain in a person's subconscious for a lifetime and can cause difficulties in one's attitude to life.

Falling asleep and staying asleep alone are not developmental problems

Behind this is a behaviour that has been ingeniously devised by evolution. Our bodies and brains have evolved over millions of years of human history and have not changed significantly in the last 200,000 years. Back then, however, it was a death sentence for a baby to fall asleep alone somewhere in a cave or under a tree. It would either have been eaten by a wild animal or died of hypothermia. Therefore, nature had a fantastic idea: When a baby gets tired, it shows its parents that it needs their closeness. And only then(!) when the baby is tired, feels the security of the mother's body, is full and warm, only then can it relax and fall asleep. Feeling tired and relaxed are the prerequisites for sleep to come. For this reason, babies still seek the closeness of protective adults. Babies do not like to sleep alone. They don't feel safe on their own. They can neither defend themselves nor bring themselves to safety. The human baby is the most vulnerable creature in the world when it is born. All it can do is call for help by crying.

Sleeping through is a myth

Babies need different amounts of sleep. In newborns, it varies from 12 to 20 hours a day. The need for sleep is distributed differently over the 24 hours. An individual sleep rhythm can only be determined after three to four months. During the first year, babies wake up between two and five times during the night and are hungry. That too is determined by nature, because the brain grows rapidly in the first three years and drinking at night ensures sufficient calorie intake so the brain has enough nutrients to grow. But here too, it must be said that babies need different amounts of calories, so the frequency of drinking differs from one baby to another. It is not until the age of three that the growth of the brain slows down and waking up at night decreases.

When children are in need, they require our closeness, our attention and security. From this they develop a good foundation for their lives: Trust in oneself and other people, the feeling of being valuable and being loved. Isn't that what we want for our children?

Text: Astrid Egger | www.familie.it