



Let's Talk About Sleep, Baby

Prioritizing Infant Safe Sleep and Effective Counseling Techniques

Why Safe Sleep Counseling Matters

Sleep-related deaths are the second leading cause of infant mortality in Baltimore City and the leading cause of death for infants 1 month to 1 year of age. Most of these deaths occur in the 2-4 month period after birth.

What you say matters.

Families trust health care providers for advice on infant safe sleep and safety practices. Studies show that when provided with safe sleep counseling, parents and caregivers are more likely to engage in safe sleep practices. The most effective counseling involves comprehensive conversations around safe sleep.

In Baltimore City, most infants who die in their sleep are found in unsafe sleep environments.

Regardless of the ultimate classification of death, detailed case reviews of sleep-related deaths in Baltimore City indicate that changeable behaviors are putting infants at increased risk of sudden death during sleep. These behaviors include:

- Bed sharing with an adult or sibling
- Sleeping on an adult bed, a couch, or other unsafe surface
- Sleeping on the stomach
- Exposure to smoke

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Since the launch of B'more for Healthy Babies' SLEEP SAFE campaign in 2010, the infant sleep death rate has dropped by over 40% in Baltimore; however, sleep death continues to be a significant contributor to overall infant mortality. **In 2022, Baltimore saw an alarming increase in sleep-related infant deaths. Baltimore City saw the highest number of sleep-related infant deaths since 2009.** A significant spike was observed in Baltimore County as well.

What is Comprehensive Safe Sleep Counseling

It is important that all families receive the following message early and often:



Alone. Most sleep-related deaths occur when babies sleep with an adult or another child, or in an adult bed or on a sofa. You can keep your baby close to you by sharing your room with your baby, but not your bed.



Back. The safest position for a baby to sleep is on their back. Babies are less likely to choke while sleeping on their backs.



Crib. Your baby's sleeping place should be clean and clear. No blankets, pillows, stuffed animals, Boppy pillows, or crib bumpers. Just a tightfitting sheet on a firm mattress.



Don't Smoke. Keep smoke away from your baby—no cigarettes, marijuana, or vaping in your home. Smoke of any kind increases a baby's risk of dying while sleeping.

How to Start the Conversation

Safe sleep counseling is best received when it is a conversation. Oftentimes, families may know the basics of safe sleep, but may have other concerns or barriers. Effective counseling sessions include the following:



Ask patients about their plans for how their baby will sleep.



Review the SLEEP SAFE message: Alone, Back, Crib, Don't Smoke



Address parents' questions and concerns.



Assess whether they need assistance in getting a crib.



Encourage parents to insist that all people taking care of the infant use safe sleep practices.



Review the SLEEP SAFE message and give relevant phone numbers and referrals.

Here are some questions that can help get the conversation started.

- ➡ What are your plans for how your baby will sleep during naps and at night?
- ➡ What questions do you have about safe sleep for your baby?
- ➡ Many people worry that their baby is more likely to choke on his or her back – do you have that worry? What concerns do you have about putting your baby to sleep alone, on their back, in a crib, or in a smoke-free home?
- ➡ Can I share some ideas on how to help your baby sleep safely? We recommend that you put your baby to sleep alone, on his or her back, in a crib, and in a smoke-free home. Do these recommendations make sense to you?
- ➡ Some patients tell me that their mothers and grandmothers believe that putting a baby to sleep on their back is unsafe. Does your family know about how to keep a baby safe while they sleep?
- ➡ Many people worry that the baby will spit up if placed on his or her back, or that the baby might choke. They also say that the baby is uncomfortable. Do you have these worries? What other worries or questions do you have about how and where your baby should sleep?
- ➡ Many patients feel that these recommendations are hard to follow. What are some things that might keep YOU from being able to follow these recommendations? What can be done to change those things?

Connecting Your Patients to Resources

HealthCare Access Maryland

Families can get a free crib and connect to a safe sleep counselor.
Call 410-649-0500, option 2 or complete the self-referral form at redcap.link/HCAMSelf

Maryland Tobacco Quitline

Pregnant smokers will get support in quitting smoking and can get gift cards for their participation.
Text "READY" to 200-400 or call 1-800-QUIT-NOW

Baltimore Provider Referral Guide

Baltimore City has many community-based resources, such as home visiting, that make a difference in their ability to practice safe sleep.
www.healthybabiesbaltimore.com/connect-clients-to-help