Your Baby's First Bed: Choosing the Right Cot

Highlights

Cots must be safe, secure, and meet safety standards.
Both new and second-hand cots require a safety check.
The right mattress and bedding are essential for your baby's safety.
Portable cots are useful but need careful setup and supervision.

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Understanding Cots

Cots are a contained sleeping environment where children can be left to rest.
It is important that cots are safe and secure.

Choosing a Safe Cot

All new and second-hand cots must comply with relevant safety standards. You do
not have to buy the latest or most expensive model of cot, but it's important
to ensure it meets the safety requirements to prevent injuries or accidents.

Key safety requirements:

Ensure the spaces between the bars of the cot are between 5cm and 9.5cm.
No protrusions should be over 5cm long.
There should be no gaps between 3cm and 5cm, 5cm and 12cm, or over 9.5cm.
Cots can have fixed or adjustable heights. For young babies, the cot should be
set at the upper height; for older babies, the lower height.

For cots with a fixed height, the depth from the base of the mattress to the top of the lowest side should be at least 60cm.

Buying a Pre-Owned Cot

Before using a second-hand cot, go through the safety checklist to ensure:

All parts are in working order.
It comes with full setup instructions.
There are no broken or wobbly bars.
The cot is free from poisonous lead-based paint.

Some exceptions apply to used cots, such as:

Protrusions should not exceed 8cm.
Gaps between 3cm and 5cm are allowed.
No need for safety labels.

Picking the Right Mattress

A mattress should be firm and well-fitting. Softer mattresses can pose risks by:

Making it easier for your baby to roll over.
Becoming uneven as your baby gets heavier.

The space between the mattress and the cot sides should be:

No more than 2.5cm when the mattress is centered.
No more than 4cm when the mattress is pushed to the side.

Always remove any plastic wrapping from new mattresses to avoid suffocation hazards.

Using Portable Cots Safely

Portable cots are designed for temporary use and can fold up, but they come with risks such as children climbing out or getting trapped.

Key safety considerations:

Ensure the cot meets safety standards.
Set it up correctly to avoid collapse.
Avoid using thick mattresses or extra layers.

Placing the Cot Wisely

Place the cot:

Away from curtains, blind cords, or any cords that could cause entanglement.
Where mobiles and toys are out of reach.
Against walls without pictures or mirrors that could fall.

Keep the cot away from:

Power points.
Heaters.
Electrical appliances and lights.

Choosing Safe Bedding

To ensure safety, bedding should not:

Cover the baby's face.
Obstruct their breathing.

Recommended bedding:

An infant sleeping bag with a fitted neck, armholes, and no hood.
Blankets tucked firmly into the mattress and not coming up higher than the baby's chest.

Avoid using in the cot:

Pillows
Doonas
Loose bedding

Lambswool
Bumpers
Soft toys

These items can pose risks such as suffocation, choking, or being used as climbing aids.

Tools And Assistance

Cot Safety Checklists: Use safety checklists to ensure the cot meets required safety standards-whether it's new or second-hand.
Instruction Manuals: Always keep and follow the setup instructions, especially when using a pre-owned cot.
Mattress Fit Guides: Guides on choosing the right mattress help prevent gaps and reduce the risk of suffocation.
Room Setup Tips: Helpful advice on where to place your baby's cot to avoid risks from cords, heaters, or falling objects.
Safe Bedding Guidelines: Handy reminders about what bedding is safe and what to avoid to reduce the risk of choking or overheating.
First-Time Parent Resources: Practical tools and visual guides on infant care and safe sleep are often shared by healthcare providers or family support centers.
Emergency Readiness Tips: Tips on how to be prepared for unexpected situations, including having emergency contact numbers clearly accessible.