

Helping your baby learn to sleep



Highlights

- Responsive settling helps babies learn to sleep.
- Recognizing tired signs makes settling easier.
- Ensuring a calm and comfortable environment aids sleep.
- Babies may need different settling techniques at different ages.
- Consistency in settling routines supports better sleep habits.

In This Article

- What responsive settling?
- Understanding your baby's tired signs
- Creating a calm pre-sleep environment
- Age-based settling techniques
- Helpful strategies for consistent sleep
- Tools and Assistance

What is responsive settling?

Responsive settling is a gentle and respectful way to support your baby's sleep development. It involves noticing your baby's cues and helping them learn how

to settle and fall asleep on their own. For babies under 6 months, more hands-on help is often needed, like rocking or feeding to sleep. As they grow, building independent sleep skills becomes more important. One helpful strategy is offering a feed after waking, not just before sleep, to break associations between feeding and falling asleep.

Understanding your baby's tired signs

Each baby shows signs of tiredness in their own way. Learning to spot these early can make settling smoother and prevent overtiredness.

Tired signs in young babies:

- Yawning
- Jerky movements
- Fist clenching or finger sucking
- Rubbing eyes or making grimaces
- Trouble focusing or crossing eyes
- Red eyebrows
- Arching back

Tired signs in older babies:

- Ear pulling
- Clumsiness
- Becoming clingy
- Fussing during meals

Creating a calm pre-sleep environment

Before settling your baby, make sure they are comfortable and their needs are met. Check for:

- Hunger or thirst
- A clean, dry diaper
- Calm body and mood
- Comfortable clothing \ (not too warm or cold\)

A cuddle, swaddle, or sleeping bag can help create a sense of security. Always follow safe sleeping guidelines, such as placing your baby on their back in a safe crib.

Age-based settling techniques

Soothing in your arms (birth to 3 months)

Rock your baby gently until they're calm.
Place them on their back in the crib once settled.
If they need more time, hold or comfort them again.

Hands-on settling (3 to 6 months)

Begin with a calming routine (e.g., diaper, story, cuddle).
Put your baby to bed awake and allow them to settle.
Offer gentle reassurance like patting, shushing, or soft strokes if needed.
Try again later if they remain unsettled.

Comfort settling (6 months and older)

This method helps babies start falling asleep on their own:

Use a calming routine.
Place the baby down awake and say goodnight.
Offer a brief comfort (e.g., pat or shush) and leave the room.
If crying escalates, return to reassure and try again.

Transition settling (gradual withdrawal)

Also known as "camping out", this method helps babies adjust gradually:

Stay next to your baby as they fall asleep without physical contact.
Move farther away over 1-4 weeks.
Unlike comfort settling, you stay in the room but don't help the baby fall asleep directly.

Helpful strategies for consistent sleep

Understand your baby's sleep cycle and patterns.
Watch for tired signs to avoid overtiredness.
Set a predictable bedtime routine that works for your family.
Keep the sleep area dark and quiet.
Stay calm and consistent-even small progress is valuable.
Adjust as needed with your baby's growth and temperament.

Tools and Assistance

Child health professionals: Talk to your pediatrician or child health nurse for personalized advice on settling techniques and sleep routines.

Parenting helplines: Many regions offer phone support services where you can speak to trained professionals about infant sleep and settling concerns.

Sleep tracking apps: Use mobile apps to monitor your baby's sleep patterns and help establish a consistent routine. Look for features like daily logs, reminders, and sleep tips.

Online workshops and courses: Join virtual parenting classes or webinars focused on baby sleep, where you can learn effective strategies and ask questions in real time.

Printable tools: Create or download sleep charts, routine checklists, and cue trackers to help recognize tired signs and maintain consistency.

Books and expert guides: Explore well-regarded books about infant sleep and responsive settling to deepen your understanding and find approaches that suit your family.

Parenting support groups: Connect with other parents through local or online communities to share experiences, exchange tips, and receive encouragement.