

Knowing When and How to Get Help With Your Child's Sleep

As a pediatric sleep consultant, I hear a lot of comments from parents like, "Where were you five years ago?" or "I should have called you three months ago!" or "I thought I could go it alone." And though I'm also guilty of not reaching out for support when I need it, I'm here to encourage you to not make the same mistake. And by support, I mean a glass of wine with a friend, an honest conversation with your doctor, or a brainstorming session with your partner to figure out what could help your family sleep better.

When my son was an infant, I assumed that sleeplessness was normal and it would always be that way for our entire family. Three years later, when my daughter needed me (and only me) for all bedtimes, I never turned to my husband to say, "Help. You do this tonight. I need a break." Now that I help families improve their sleep for a living, I marvel at how long it took me to deal with my own situation.

I am suggesting that you take action sooner and make a decision for the good of your family.

Tell your pediatrician and your OB or midwife what is actually happening in your family when the sun goes down. If you feel uncomfortable bringing it up, you can begin the conversation with something like, "This is hard for me to say..." You can also ask for a referral for professional help right off the bat. And you can do all of this over the phone if getting to an office seems overwhelming or logistically difficult. Call a friend and say, "I need you to listen to what's going on and help me." Ask her to babysit, cook, fold laundry, or do whatever will give you a break. Trust me, she will say yes. One time when our power was out, a friend did all of my laundry – all of it – and she has two boys to take care of, not to mention a husband, a job, and cats. Here's the thing: People like to help each other. It's our nature.

Look for support if you need it. There are so many ways to get help both in person and virtually. Find a new moms group or ask your OB or midwife to recommend a support group run by a social worker or a psychologist to help struggling parents. If it's too hard for you to ask, get someone – your mother, your partner, a friend – to help you find one. It doesn't matter who it is, you just need to start the conversation with someone who is going to listen without judging.

Start small. I often hear from parents that their situation is beyond hope. But I believe that every child can become a better sleeper. I also know that if you only look at the big picture – the months of bad nights, bad naps, and sleep deprivation – it can feel downright hopeless.

Instead, focus on one thing: bedtime, for example. Pick one hurdle, tackle it, and move on. The key here is doing it right the first time so that you can have the confidence to have success. If you know you are using the right method for your child, then it will work, believe it or not.

Find the right approach for you. Check out a variety of books. (You don't have to read them cover to cover, skim and find what resonates with you.) I like parts of every one that is out there from Marc Weissbluth's *Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child* to Dr. Sears's *The Baby Sleep Book*. Other books I like include *The Sleepeasy Solution*, *The Sleep Lady's Good Night Sleep Tight*, and *The Complete Sleep Guide for Contented Babies and Toddlers*.

If someone's advice makes you feel bad, then skip it. Find what feels right to you and apply it to your child. Take the same approach to finding a sleep consultant – make sure he or she understands you and is willing to get to know your child and your situation.

Good luck and remember: Take it one good bedtime at a time. Eventually they will all add up to a rested family.

source: Seleni.org

03/09/2013