

Co-Sleeping

More U.S. parents than ever are sharing a bed with their children. The New York Times reported in 2007 that 13 percent of parents co-sleep with their infants. Once those infants become toddlers, that figure skyrockets. And many more parents are "closet co-sleepers" who do it but won't admit their secret.

Top 3 Reasons Co-Sleeping May Be Dangerous for Infants

1. Tossing and turning: There is a risk that a parent could roll on top of a baby, potentially injuring or suffocating him or her. While this is uncommon, it is possible.
2. Down will come baby: Unless a baby is in the middle of the bed between two adults, it is easy for him or her to squirm or roll off the bed. Surrounding a baby with pillows or other bolsters is neither safe nor effective.
3. This bed's too soft: Parents tend to sleep in beds with soft mattresses and heavy comforters. It is safer for a baby to sleep in a bed with a slightly harder mattress with lighter covers or none at all.

Experts advise never to co-sleep on a sofa, as your baby could get wedged in the cracks between the cushions or between you and the back of the couch. Co-sleeping on a water bed is also a no-no, as they are too soft and may have deep crevices around the frame where your baby could get trapped. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has officially recommended against the family bed. Proponents of attachment parenting support co-sleeping.

What Moms Can Do about Co-Sleeping

Pediatrician Dr. Cara Natterson weighs in on the issue of the family bed:

As children get older, the family bed debate focuses much more on parenting and much less on safety. Some older toddlers and preschool-aged children share a bed with their parents, or they get out of their own beds in the middle of the night and join their parents.

The issues here have to do mostly with privacy and limit-setting. Critics argue that adults need privacy in their bedroom and that children need to learn how to feel safe and comfortable in their own space.

Some parents whose children unwittingly join them in the middle of the night also complain that it is impossible to get a good night's sleep if their child is tossing and turning in a cramped bed. But often parents who choose to share their beds with older

children describe enjoying it -- it is the one time in the day that they can cuddle with their child.

In my practice, I often suggest that if a child stays in her own bed while the sun is down, then she can come into her parents' room when the sun comes up. This allows for good quality overnight sleep for everyone and some nice cuddle time in the morning.

Of course, there are exceptions to every rule. Most parents sleep with their children during illnesses. This is practical -- if your child is sick and having a fitful sleep, your presence may make a big difference. But toddlers, especially, see a window of opportunity after an illness. If you get right back into good habits when your child is healthy, it tends to be a pretty easy transition to everyone returning to a good night's sleep.

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