



Free E-Book



**Sleep Prop's vs
Positive Sleep
Associations**

Sleep

is a biological necessity,
not a luxury



Sleep props versus positive sleep associations...

And how to recognise the difference

There's no doubt about it; becoming a mum is overwhelming. There's so much - too much - information and well-intentioned advice (that's usually largely based on opinions) out there. Not to mention the fact that when new mums start researching what they need to buy for life with their new bundle, they're targeted with all the things that will supposedly support their babies to sleep, and will make their lives easier.

There are nests, pods, lulla dolls, white noise machines, red lights, soft toys, vibrating toys, lullaby machines, swings, bouncers, weighted blankets, essential oils, and more cuddlies than you could possibly imagine.



So, how on earth are you supposed to decipher from this list what will actually be beneficial for you and your child? In order to start determining this, it helps to understand the difference between sleep props and the things that build positive sleep associations.

A matter of safety before we dive into the differences, the first aspect we need to evaluate is safety.

- ✘ If it's something they sleep on, or in, that isn't a hard, flat surface, it's likely not safe.
- ✘ If it's something in the bed, and being targeted at newborns, it's likely not safe.
- ✘ If it wraps or ties around the area where your baby sleeps and reduces the recycled air (like a cot bumper), it's likely not safe
- ✘ If it has loose ties or strings that could pose a choking hazard, it's not safe
- ✘ If it puts your baby on an incline, or straps them into a position, it's likely not safe.

A trap lots of new parents fall into is thinking that if it's on the market, it must be safe - but this simply isn't true!

There are very few controls in place.

The one control that does exist relates to fire hazards, so all products are tested for flammability.

Many then assert that they have been “safety tested”, which is misleading.

It pays to be cautious.....



Sleep props versus sleep associations

Both sleep props and positive sleep associations can be things we buy - like baby sleep gadgets - or things we do, like a routine.

There's not a clear cut distinction that one category is positive and one negative either

- both things we buy and things we do can fall into both camps.

The difference comes down to sustainability.



Sleep props are something that a child needs to fall asleep, and are usually delivered by a parent.

They also tend to rely on you to redeliver. If you find yourself having to do or help with this thing after every sleep cycle it's probably a sleep prop.

A positive sleep association, on the other hand, is something that encourages your child to go back to sleep themselves, and encourages healthy sleep habits.

You might still do it initially, like putting their sleeping bag on, but it's '**once and done**'.

Ultimately positive sleep associations encourage self-settling, consolidated naps, and decent chunks of night sleep.

Conversely, sleep props create a reliance on parents to help a child to go to - or get back to - sleep.

This results in short naps, fragmented night sleep, and a pattern that is usually difficult to sustain, hence why this distinction is important to think about.



A note on newborn sleep

Before we move on to some of the common sleep props and associations we see and use, it's important to note that in the early months of your child's life it's fine to feel like you need every prop available to help your child sleep.

Newborns need lots of assistance when it comes to sleeping.



This is completely normal, so don't panic. While it's helpful to keep in mind the long-term picture, you've still got time to get there.

In the long term, you don't want to rely on them all, so a couple of strategies can be to alternate the props and aim to get at least one nap a day happening with them flat in their bed and not moving - as opposed to on you, in the pram, or similar.

You'll see more on why shortly!



Sleep prop or not?

Some of the common ones we see

Like I've said, the distinction is fluid, so things that parents are wondering about can usually fall into both camps.

It all comes down to the way that they're used.

With that in mind, you can assess whether they are positive for your family and situation.

For example:

- A dummy can be both a sleep prop, or a positive sleep association, depending on whether your child is old enough to find and replace it, or if it doesn't fall out.
- White noise can be a positive association if it's safely outside the cot, or strapped to the top and if it plays for the duration of their sleep, or they only need it to go to sleep initially.
- A sleeping bag is usually a positive sleep association because you put it on once and it stays on to keep them warm and encourage them to keep sleeping. This may change when they learn how to take it off and demand you come back in to fix it.

- Swaddling tends to be a positive sleep association because it is also 'once and done', however swaddling can also become a sleep prop if you're still doing it when your child is too old (usually between 4-6 months). They may bust out of the swaddle and require you to keep rewrapping them.

- A lovie or cuddlie can also be a positive if it is safe, small, and your baby is old enough to move it, so that they can use it to help them go back to sleep themselves. This requires them to no longer be swaddled and, obviously, it needs to not represent a strangling risk.

- Again, this can become a prop if older babies throw it out of the cot and use this as a tactic to get you to keep coming back into the room. There are strategies here, like delaying the return of it and being sure not to treat these tactics as a game.

The most common sleep prop - the parents!

While it's true that in almost every single consult we go on, there is some sleep prop that we need to eliminate, many parents don't initially see this.

There's nothing in their home that they associate as being a sleep prop; no baby gadgets used at sleep time.

But they have to rock their child. Or pat, or place, their hand on their back each time they wake.

It's tricky to realise that they have become their child's sleep prop. If you're happy with what you're doing, that's completely fine - but if you're not, it is possible to change it and find other ways to support your child to sleep and to self-settle.

The other scenario we see is those kids who have become “motion junkies” - they rely on movement to get them to sleep.

This is why our education around sleep props versus positive sleep associations starts early.

Ideally you want your child to be able to fall asleep in a stationery bed as opposed to a moving or upright position, as that environment is not sustainable.

While these techniques might work well for the newborn months - and are fine to do at that point - they can become a prop if their use extends too far.



Duration

While we're wary of things becoming sleep props, it's not the case that you need to move on from sleep associations quickly. This shouldn't be viewed as the ultimate goal or even a good thing.

Don't be in a hurry, or feel like you're not progressing if you are still relying on sleep associations; it's fine that your child needs them - especially for naps, which are harder than night sleeps because of our bodies rhythms.

What many don't realise is that we all have sleep associations - even adults.

You'll have specific things you do, perhaps in a particular order or in a particular way - little rituals that help you to get ready and go off to sleep.

However, if you're wondering about the duration before ditching some of the ones your child has, this varies according to the specific sleep association.

For **dummies**, the “dummy fairy” usually visits around aged 3, when they are old enough to understand they no longer need one.

Similarly, **sleeping bags** are usually outgrown by the time your child transitions to a bed.



White noise is often stopped when your child drops their daytime sleep, but you might still use it when your house is noisy in the evening, or when you go away to a different (and also possibly noisier) sleep environment.

Cuddlies and lovies usually stick around longer, but the trick is to limit these to sleep time, so they aren't taken out of the house unless your child is going somewhere else to sleep.

Most children tend to lose interest in these around the time they start school, if you don't let them take them everywhere with them.



At the end of the day, only you can know whether you are edging closer to the common fear of “creating a rod for your own back”.

It's about being mindful of creating habits you don't want to sustain long-term; that's when we see the creation of problems that parents later have to tackle.

No one is getting a good sleep if you need to redo something every 45 minutes, after each sleep cycle.

Positive sleep associations cue us that it's time to go to sleep and lead to longer, more consolidated, healthier sleep for everyone.

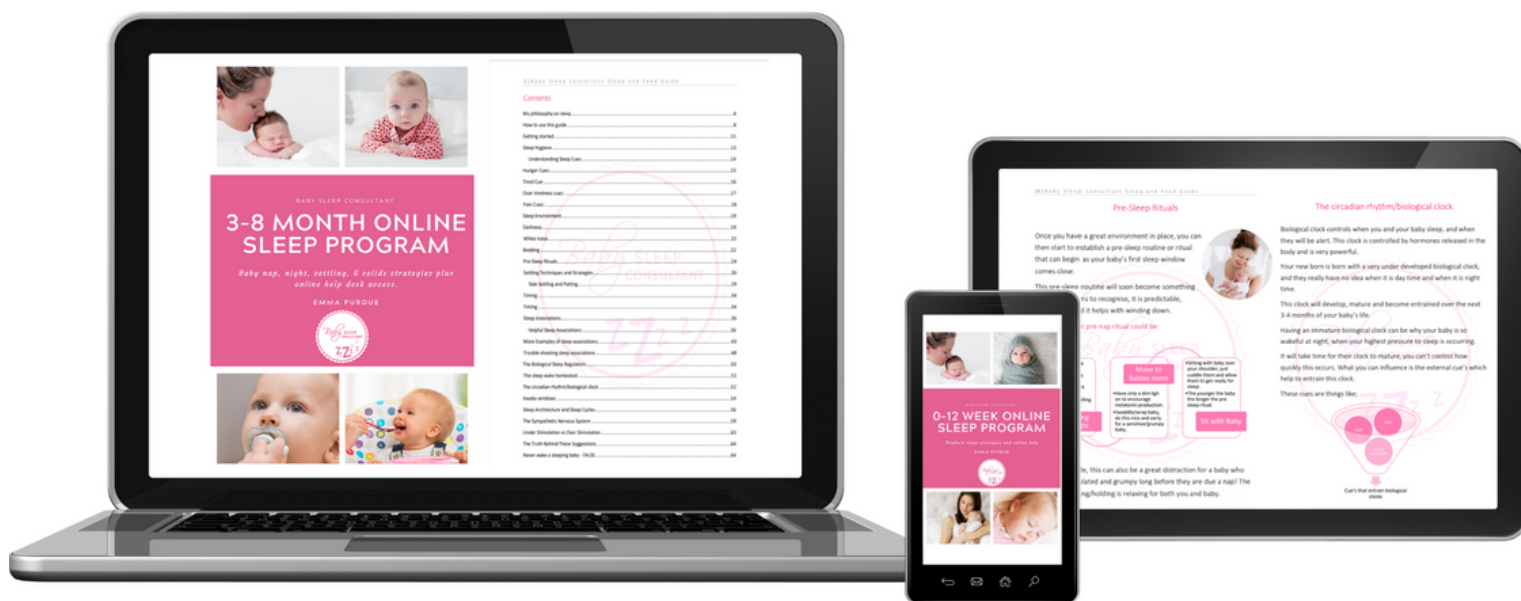


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Our online sleep programs will help you to establish nap routines, teach your baby to sleep through the night, self settle, and stop cat napping.

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Laura Adam  recommends Baby Sleep Consultant.

16 May at 19:18 · 



Getting a sleeping consult changed our lives. I had the pleasure of working with Cherene who was honestly amazing. She was so easy to talk to and related so well without judgement, it made it really easy to talk to her about our struggles. Before getting Cherene's help, we had a baby who wouldn't day nap, was up every hour through the night snack feeding and would only feed to sleep or sleep on you if he did sleep. We now have a baby who is self settling and sleeping amazingly through the night and starting to take good day naps. Having that support to encourage you and also help you when you hit a road block helped me so much. Money well spent! Thank you so much 😊



Monica Birch reviewed Baby Sleep Consultant – 

7 April 2015 · 



Every time I use these lovely ladies we get great results and it's great to have such amazing advice and help available!

 Baby Sleep Consultant and Grace Revell



Sophie Hickmer  recommends Baby Sleep Consultant.



Day 6 of this little dude following the Sleep and Feed guide. He is just gone 9 months old.

We have gone from rocking to sleep every nap (often took half an hour), waking up after 40 minutes, and waking 4 plus times a night. Now, he puts himself to sleep in his bed within minutes, generally pretty happily. He sleeps for 1.5-2 hours as per plan in the arvo too. Nights are still a work in progress but has only woken once or twice each night since starting- such an improvement. Thank you!!

Creating the right sleep environment, spaced soothing and your timing routine has been amazing for us- so impressed!