

## TIP SHEET

### Response Based Sleep & Settling for Infants & Toddlers

Safe<sup>ss</sup>  
Sleep  
Space

In the first four months of life, even though babies have much maturing to do, they are capable of some pretty amazing things for their tiny age. Soon after birth babies can focus their eyes enough to gaze into your eyes, they recognise the voices of their close family and they communicate with us through their behaviour.

There are also many things a newborn is yet to master. A small baby cannot maintain their body temperature, protect itself from harm, or even reach their milk supply if they are not close by, and they most certainly cannot manage extreme states of arousal alone just yet.

So how then does this translate to the care of a baby from birth to four months of age?

Babies are not yet able to control their emerging emotions and responses to the world around them. You can help a baby feel safe and calm so they can learn to regulate their emotions by offering;

- Warm, gentle snuggle cuddles
- Speaking calmly and in a soothing tone
- Gently rocking and/or gentle, rhythmical patting
- Or quietly singing or humming.

Sometimes your baby may take a little while to calm, which is normal. The crucial thing is to stay to help them manage. A baby this age becomes overwhelmed overtired and unsettled, very easily. Slow your gentle, kind care and comforting so your baby has time to respond to your soothing efforts.

There are times when parents feel they are not helping because their baby just keeps crying, but by you being there, helps baby to learn that even when the going gets tough, you are there for them. It won't always be possible to stop whatever is causing the distress, but by being there, you help your baby progressively learn to manage. With time, the distressing experiences become more tolerable because of your support, and as baby matures, they begin to self regulate.

Babies can be over stimulated because of their limited ability to regulate incoming information. Allow your baby moments where they can just 'be with you'. Babies are often just happy looking at you, so feel free to enjoy this without feeling you need to "do" anything – magic happens in these moments! The relationship they are developing with you at this time is the most important thing in their world to help them lay down the foundations for healthy relationships throughout life.

Until around 3-4 months your baby has no circadian rhythm, meaning, there are no circulating hormones to govern day and night sleep patterns. Babies do develop patterns of sleeping and waking but they are driven by hunger and the need to sleep. So even though your baby has no hormonally driven sleep/wake patterns at first, you can help them develop a day night rhythm, by providing predictable cues at sleep time. A snuggle/cuddle, some quiet time and white noise are effective and soothing, sleep time messages. These

help your baby develop the sense of when this all happens ... so does sleep. Babies naturally have variable sleep times in the first few months of life as their sleep patterns and the hormones that govern their sleep develop. Rigid, time focused schedules are inappropriate for babies, as they will not work with the totally normal variations of baby sleep and feeding needs. Your baby will tell you when it is sleep time for them, by their tired signs. If you are guided by those signs, a natural pattern will follow, without unnecessary distress. At night, when feeding your baby, keep the lights low, your voice quiet and calm and prevent unnecessary stimulation. Just offer a warm cuddle and a quiet feed so your baby begins to see the difference between day and night feeds and sleep.

Safe physical sleep is very important at this age. It is critical that babies sleep on

their back (not side or tummy) where the bedding cannot cover their mouth and nose, nor where they can be overheated and where they are not exposed to smoke. All baby sleep needs to be safe and the SIDS and KIDS website is a credible and informed resource, for both parents and professionals. If in doubt, find out!

**Simple exercise:** Try viewing the world through the eyes of your baby; what is their world like? What might experiences be like for them? How might they be feeling? Thinking about your baby this way can sometimes help parents offer appropriate care and opportunities that are both supportive of the natural development of this age, as well as providing the environment for your baby to flourish.

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At Safe Sleep Space we offer a range of services; phone consultations, home visits and day stay programs. We also have resources; ROCKABUB app, 0-12 months sleep DVD, toddler sleep DVD and the Safe Sleep Space book & eBook, none of which involve controlled crying. For more information go to; [www.safesleepspace.com.au](http://www.safesleepspace.com.au) or call us on 1300 775 337

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