



# Bedsharing Talking Points

From *Sweet Sleep: Nighttime and Naptime Strategies for the Breastfeeding Family*  
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- Bedsharing definition: Baby and mother share the same safe sleep surface all or part of the night. Sharing sleep on sofas and recliners is not bedsharing. Failing to distinguish between safe and unsafe surfaces is a common research error.
- SIDS is not suffocation and breathing hazards are not SIDS. Failing to distinguish between SIDS and suffocation is a common research error.
- No physiological explanation has ever been proposed for a baby dying of SIDS simply because he's near his mother.
- Breastfeeding mothers instinctively protect their infants in their sleep.<sup>1</sup> They adopt a cuddle curl position, and they touch and kiss their babies and adjust the baby's environment, often without waking.<sup>2</sup> Breastfed babies instinctively stay in that protected cove.<sup>3</sup>
- The bedsharing, breastfeeding mother's sleep-wake cycles synchronize with her baby's, allowing for low-stress, low-level arousals for each.<sup>4</sup>
- Most infants have bedshared with their mothers throughout history and worldwide.<sup>5</sup>
- Sixty to 75 percent of U.S. and British breastfeeding mothers bedshare at some point.<sup>6</sup>
- Babies' cardiac, respiratory, and other physiological systems are partly regulated by maternal skin-to-skin contact and shared sleep.<sup>7</sup>
- All mothers in the early postpartum period have fragmented sleep and most take several naps during the daytime.<sup>8</sup>
- Babies take between six weeks and four months to *begin* sleeping longer stretches.<sup>9</sup>
- Most breastfed babies nurse several times at night during the first six months.<sup>10</sup>
- By about six weeks, breastfeeding mothers tend to stop returning the baby to the crib after feeds<sup>11</sup> and adopt other strategies to maximize their sleep. These include supplementing with formula and moving to a less safe surface to share sleep.<sup>12</sup> One study found that more than 40 percent of breastfeeding mothers fell asleep at some point sitting up in a sofa, recliner, or upholstered chair.<sup>13</sup>
- The American Academy of Pediatrics, summarizing four studies, states that bedsharing does not put babies at higher risk of death after three months. Findings in the studies themselves ranged from 8 weeks to 14 weeks.<sup>14</sup>
- Excellent resources are the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine's Clinical Protocol #6: Guideline on Co-Sleeping and Breastfeeding ([bfmed.org/Media/Files/Protocols/Protocol\\_6.pdf](http://bfmed.org/Media/Files/Protocols/Protocol_6.pdf)), Dr. Helen Ball's website ([isisonline.org.uk](http://isisonline.org.uk)), and Dr. James McKenna's website ([cosleeping.nd.edu](http://cosleeping.nd.edu)).
- Breastfeeding mothers *will* bedshare.<sup>15</sup> Failure to provide safe bedsharing information may result in more harm than good.<sup>16</sup>
- Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months is recommended by virtually every health authority in the world.<sup>17</sup>
- Exclusively breastfeeding families have the lowest rates of infant mortality in the world and in the United States, including SIDS and suffocation deaths.<sup>18</sup>
- Babies do not have the ability to self-soothe<sup>19</sup> or use adult strategies such as reading or counting sheep to put themselves to sleep.
- When mothers fully adopt the Safe Sleep Seven ([lila.org/sweetsleepbook](http://lila.org/sweetsleepbook)), the published risk of SIDS or suffocation for their babies is minute. All seven practices must be fully adopted.

## References: Bedsharing Talking Points

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