

MINDSET SHIFT:

It's not *your* job to make your baby sleep. It's your *baby's* job to fall asleep. Seriously! That takes all the pressure off of you. If you let your baby take the reins in the sleep department and develop the skills to fall asleep on his own, your life will become so much easier.

Once your baby learns how to fall asleep on her own at bedtime and fall back asleep on her own after middle-of-the-night wakings, things are going to be very different in your home. Yes, there will be some short-term crying, but the process will be done in a way that keeps your baby emotionally connected to you to the whole time. You will be reassuring him throughout the entire process – you can even stay in the room the whole time if you want to! You can tweak and personalize this process to make it as hands on as you want and use it in alignment with your parenting style.

This guide will help you tackle your baby's nights. If you need help with naps too, check out my nap guide! But first, let's get those nights down pat.

SLEEP ENVIRONMENT

Don't underestimate the power of a calming environment that is conducive towards sleep. Imagine you had to sleep with the lights on, without a blanket, laying on the floor! You'd have a hard time, wouldn't you? In the same vein, there are certain things that help all babies sleep better, across the board:

- » **Blackout curtains** These are really important. Sleep is in its lightest stage after 4am when the sun begins to rise. Regular blinds allow morning sunlight to peek in around the corners and through the cracks, waking your baby earlier. At the risk of sounding like a science geek, I'd like you to think about it like this: sunlight has the power to pierce through your baby's closed eyelids *while he sleeps* and send a "time to wake up!" message to his brain. This can mean your baby waking up at 6am instead of 7am, every day. The small addition of blackout curtains adds up to a whole lot more sleep. Your baby is not afraid of the dark – babies aren't developmentally capable of being afraid of the dark! Fear of the dark can only exist when your baby has an imagination, to imagine scary monsters or animals. That develops at around age 3, which is why so many preschoolers are afraid of the dark. Not your baby though! Trust me on this one: a nightlight will do more harm than good for your baby's sleep. Light, even a drop of it, inhibits the production of melatonin, which helps your baby fall asleep. So ditch that nightlight!
- » **White noise** This is another really important one. White noise helps babies sleep better. Your baby's brain still hears and processes sound during sleep, which means that a knock at the door or a creaking floorboard can wake him up, especially while

he transitions between sleep cycles. The magic of white noise is that it keeps the brain focused on the monotonous, unchanging white noise, which causes the brain to tune out the other sounds. White noise is soothing and familiar to your baby. In your womb, your baby was surrounded by constant noise. We tend to think of a fetus's existence as peaceful and quiet, but the reality is anything but that! The rush of blood flowing through your veins, rumblings of your digestive system and the unceasing pounding of your heartbeat combine to create a rhythmic, throbbing roar around the clock for 9 months straight. The volume in there is the equivalent of a lawnmower, and it never turns off. Silence is bizarre for babies. White noise also reduces stress levels in babies by blocking out stimulation that would overwhelm them normally.

The natural instinct we have to loudly shush a crying baby is there because it *works*. Loud, rushing sounds soothe babies. And that's what white noise is, a non-stop shushing sound that soothes your baby and helps her sleep.

You want the volume of the white noise to be equivalent to that of a shower running. To be heard over a running shower, you'd have to raise your voice, but you wouldn't need to shout. That's about the volume you want the white noise to play at; if you can't hear it from the hallway through your baby's closed door, it's not loud enough.

Choose a white noise that doesn't have an automatic shut-off feature (yup, we're keeping it on the whole night!) and has no pattern in the sounds, like ocean waves or chirping crickets, as these would wake your baby at the end of a sleep cycle.

- » **Video Monitor** This is technically optional, but I strongly recommend it. Unless you'll be staying in your baby's room for the entire night and for all naps, you'll want a way to visually check in on your baby without disturbing her.
- » **Safe Crib** Your baby's crib should be completely bare for the first 12 months. No bumpers, pillows, blankets, rolled up towels, crib positioners, flat-head prevention pillows, wedges, Dock A Tots, or stuffed animals. These all pose danger to a small baby. The only thing that should be in your baby's crib is a tightly fitted flat sheet.