

# Understanding Infant Sleep:

## What Every Parent Needs to Know About Sleep in the First Year

You can trust your instincts, respond to your child, *and* make meaningful changes that support better sleep for your family. You don't have to choose between rest and relationship—you can have *both*.

With a holistic, family-led approach, we recognize that sleep is just one piece of a much bigger picture. Together, we look at the factors that matter most for your child's sleep—considering their temperament, health, sleep needs, emotional needs, development, behavior, sensory experiences, and your family's unique dynamics.

Because when we understand the whole picture, we can move away from generic or one-size-fits-all advice and instead create a plan that feels realistic, supportive, and thoughtfully tailored to your child and family.

### 01 Your Child's Sleep Is Not Broken

When you're exhausted, it's understandable to wonder if something is wrong. But many of the things parents worry about—night waking, feeding overnight, needing closeness, or wanting help falling asleep—are actually normal parts of infant sleep.

Sleep develops gradually, and every child follows their own timeline. It's common for sleep to feel like it's moving forward one week and backward the next as babies grow, learn new skills, and move through different stages of development. Often, these changes aren't signs that something is wrong—they're signs that your baby is growing.

Of course, "normal" doesn't always feel manageable. If sleep is taking a toll on your wellbeing or your family's, it's okay to seek support.

### 02 Sleep Needs Vary More Than Most Parents Realize

Even among babies of the same age, sleep needs can vary quite a lot. Some naturally need more sleep, while others thrive on less. It can be tempting to compare your baby's sleep to schedules online, social media posts, or other children, but those comparisons often create more worry than clarity.

Your baby is an individual. Getting to know their individual sleep needs can be far more helpful than trying to make their sleep match someone else's expectations. These ranges help illustrate just how much sleep needs can vary:

#### National Sleep Foundation Typical Sleep Ranges (Per 24 Hours)

##### 0-3 Months

- **Lower End of Typical Sleep:** 11–13 hours
- **Middle Range of Typical Sleep:** 14–17 hours
- **Higher End of Typical Sleep:** 18–19 hours

##### 4-11 Months

- **Lower End of Typical Sleep:** 10–11 hours
- **Middle Range of Typical Sleep:** 12–15 hours
- **Higher End of Typical Sleep:** 16–18 hours

**Instead of Asking:** "How can I get my baby to sleep more?"

**Try Asking:** "Does my baby generally seem rested, engaged, and content when awake?"

### 03 Your Child's Unique Temperament Plays A BIG Role

Every baby is born with their own unique temperament—their blueprint for how they experience and respond to the world. Some are naturally more sensitive, alert, persistent, social, cautious, adaptable, or intense than others. These traits aren't problems to fix; they're simply part of who your child is—and understanding them can help guide the way you support sleep.

A highly alert baby may find it harder to switch off, while a sensitive baby may wake more easily or need extra support to settle. A persistent baby may communicate their needs more strongly. A social baby may be reluctant to miss out on what's happening around them.

This is one reason standard sleep advice can feel so confusing. What works beautifully for one child may have little effect on another—not because you're doing anything wrong, but because children experience the world differently.

Understanding your child's temperament can help you make sense of their sleep and find approaches that best fit their personality, strengths, and needs.

**Instead of Asking:** "Why isn't this working?"

**Try Asking:** "How might my child's unique temperament be shaping what they need right now?"

## 04 Connection Supports Regulation

Self-regulation is a developmental process. Babies and young children are not yet able to consistently regulate their emotions on their own when they are distressed, overwhelmed, or dysregulated. This skill develops over time through many repeated experiences of being soothed and supported by a caregiver.

Babies are biologically wired to be co-regulators. When they become upset, they rely on a trusted adult's regulated nervous system to help them return to calm. Responding to your baby is how they learn safety, connection, and regulation.

Over time, these repeated co-regulating experiences build the foundation for self-regulation as the brain matures.

Holding, feeding, rocking, cuddling, and responding are not bad habits—they are natural ways babies find regulation and move toward sleep.

**Instead of asking:** "Why won't my baby settle on their own?"

**Try asking:** "What support does my child need from me to feel regulated right now?"

## 05 Sleep Challenges Are Communication

Sleep is often one of the first places children show us that something in their world, body, or development is changing. Because sleep is closely connected to growth, health, and emotional development, changes in sleep can be meaningful signals about what your child may need more support with.

Many sleep challenges are temporary and reflect a child adapting to something new—like changing sleep needs, developmental milestones, teething, illness, separation awareness, hunger, sensory needs, changes in routine, travel, childcare transitions, learning new skills, growth spurts, increased awareness, or family stress.

While these shifts are often normal, they are also information. They can help us understand what is making sleep harder and what might help your child feel more settled and supported. When we slow down and get curious, we're better able to respond in ways that meet the need behind the change rather than just the behavior itself.

**Instead of asking:** "How do I stop this behavior?"

**Try asking:** "What might my child be experiencing, and how can I support them through it?"

## 06 You Matter Too

Parents need support too. If this feels hard right now, you're not alone in that. When sleep is hard, it doesn't just affect your nights—it can impact your mental and physical health, your emotional regulation, your relationships, your work, and your overall wellbeing. It's not just the lack of sleep—it's the constant demand, the broken rest, and the feeling of being "on" all the time. If you're feeling stretched, exhausted, or overwhelmed, *that matters*.

Sometimes the most helpful shift isn't trying to immediately change your baby's sleep—it's finding ways for the whole family to get more rest, more support, and more breathing room in whatever ways are possible right now. There's no perfect version of this—only what helps your family move through this season with a little more steadiness.

This might mean accepting help when it's offered, sharing responsibilities where you can, or resting in small moments instead of waiting for long stretches of sleep to catch up. And it can be hard to admit when you need more support than you're getting.

Asking for help is not a sign that you're failing—it's a sign that you're human and that support matters. When you are supported, it becomes easier for your child to feel supported too.

**KIND**  
**AND RESTED**

Court Wright  
*Holistic Family Sleep Coach, NCS, PPD*  
[www.kindandrested.com](http://www.kindandrested.com)

