

THE 5 MOST COMMON MISTAKES

Sleep-Deprived Parents Make...and How to Fix Them

by Dr. Darria Long, MD, MBA. Widely renown as an expert in making life and health better for women, Dr. Darria Long, MD, MBA is a national TV health expert and contributor, national best-selling author of "Mom Hacks," board certified Emergency Department physician, TED speaker, and a mom.

Parenting in the first few weeks can feel a little bit like the Hunger Games....where the odds are NEVER in your favor. As a mom, I get it. It takes a village – and we all need to help each other.

Let's face it, we're on a learning curve as new parents – and occasionally we trip up. With that in mind, I want to share my experiences, and the lessons of thousands of parents who have gone before you to help identify and overcome these common challenges:

- 1. Not creating a separation between "Day" and "Night."** When you bring baby home, he'll try to sleep all day, and then be ready to jam at 2am. This is not because he is a sleep terrorist. Our Circadian Rhythm isn't fully developed when we're born, so newborns can have "night/day reversal." But all is not lost. Help hasten this development by creating a difference in daytime versus nighttime activities and environment. During the day, allow baby to have activity: tummy time, playing with toys, lying on a kick-and-play mat or in a bouncy seat with hanging toys, go outside, and have plenty of light when he's not sleeping. Then at night, keep the lights dim, volumes quiet, and minimize any activity beyond what's necessary.
- 2. Letting baby sleep in an unsafe environment.** As tempting as it may be, it's just *not* safe to let baby sleep in rockers, swings, or any other equipment not specifically designed for sleep. What about parents' bed? Unfortunately, having baby sleep in your bed (on your mattress with you) QUADRUPLES their risk of SIDS. The safest spot? "Within arms reach, but out of harm's way." Let baby sleep on a firm, flat space that is baby's OWN sleeping space. The 4moms mamaRoo sleep bassinet can sit adjacent to a parent's bed, and is a perfect example of a safe sleep environment within immediate reach. In fact, by having the baby sleep in your room (but NOT in your bed) – you cut the risk of SIDS by 80%.
- 3. Inconsistent bedtimes.** Our brains LOVE a good routine – and babies are no different. Bedtime routine is about more than just getting your child washed and into PJs. A good routine actually sends a signal to your child's brain that when the routine starts, sleep time is coming. They can then start to slow down and relax into sleep, instead of fighting it. Start by choosing a "bedtime," then follow with a 15-minute routine that can include bath, PJs + swaddle, nurse or bottle-feed, optional rocking/short lullaby or story (for slightly older infants), then bed. Along those lines, keep the location "where" they sleep consistent. Having a consistent PLACE (such as the bassinet) where they sleep will also help them link that to sleep.

4. Not maximizing / leveraging soothing techniques. We think of the first few months after birth as “The 4th Trimester” – a time when baby is adjusting to life out of the womb. In this period, anything that can help replicate life in utero will help to soothe baby. One of the best ways is skin-to-skin contact. This is KEY for sleep-deprived mamas. It’s important to know that other family members can do skin-to-skin, too. Dads, partners, grandparents – baby will respond to all of these (and perhaps give mama a well-needed break). Other options include rocking and white noise. The 4moms mamaRoo sleep bassinet is a fantastic option because it has five unique motion and speed settings, vibration, and 4 different white noises – a veritable baby-soother all in one.

5. Judging yourself. We parents are hard on ourselves – and when you add in sleep deprivation, we’re even more critical of ourselves. Know that no parent is perfect. No one’s baby or motherhood looks like Instagram perfection. And – please believe me as both a physician and a mama when I tell you– no one knows your baby (and what “works” or “doesn’t work”) as well as you do. Trust your gut. Trust that you are learning and that you don’t have to be the dictionary definition of “perfect” to be exactly the parent your child needs.

Until babies are born with their own personalized “manual,” we parents will all learn by doing. And that’s ok.

Remember – you’ve GOT this.

-Dr. Darria