



# Why Babies Fight Sleep: How to Manage Night Wakings

## Part 1: Intro & the information you need first

*There's a reason your child is waking. This approach comes from **Aware Parenting** (Aletha Solter, Ph.D). It's about identifying the underlying reasons behind what your baby is experiencing.*

*It's about more than just sleep. This is really a communication process. You'll gain much insight about what your baby is trying to tell you and how to communicate with him/her. This process will serve you far beyond the topic of sleep and throughout your lives together!*

🌸 **First and most importantly: you're not failing.** 🌻

### What fighting sleep means

- Usually used when there's some kind of struggle, either crying or busy/not settling
- If no crying related to sleep now, think back to when sleep troubles began?
- **Why babies cry:**
  - o Obviously babies cry for immediate needs like hunger
  - o Second reason: to release stress and pent up feelings. Healthy, natural healing response; needs to communicate and let off steam in your loving, listening presence.
- **Why crying is often associated with sleep:** vulnerable when tired, feelings bubble up
- Most advice teaches 1) find out why crying, 2) stop the crying. Yes, meet needs; but stress release feelings actually need to come out!
- The whole picture:
  - o The natural response to being sleepy is to sleep
  - o "Fighting" is actually either 1) those feelings trying to get out, or 2) baby fighting to keep the feelings in
  - o So when the feelings haven't come out yet before falling asleep, they'll keep lurking, still looking for a way out ...voila, night wakings! (Not every case, but this is most common.)

### Why sleep associations happen

- Whatever's typically used to stop the crying easily becomes a learned emotional habit
- It's the *feelings* that become associated. But feelings often tend to arise when vulnerable (tired). So the "sleep association" is usually really a "big feelings association."

### Sleep is a state (not a skill!)

- State of consciousness
- Innate biological function for survival

- Eventually, we can learn skills for managing the state of our nervous system. But sleep itself is not a *skill*.
- Good news! Your baby already knows how to sleep. If not sleeping, there's something else going on we need to listen to.
- Do you ever lie awake thinking about something? It's not that you don't have the skill to sleep, it has to do with the state you're in. It's preventing from relaxing.

### **Sleep is also a separation**

#### **Sleeping through the night**

- No one literally sleeps through the night without waking; doesn't necessarily mean uninterrupted sleep. Key is to go back to sleep.
  - o Newborns obviously need to eat
  - o 4<sup>th</sup> trimester, still adjusting and still infant brain patterns for sleep
  - o Children/adults = 6 to 9 hours at a time
  - o Babies, some say it means 5 hour stretch
- Biological, legit need for closeness; brain is driven to make sure they're safe
- I don't find there's 1 answer to how often a baby "should/should not" wake

#### **Crying and sleep:**

- Common advice says stop the crying, baby can't calm down
- Reality is, babies innately know in order to sleep, need to relax; and in order to relax, may need to let off some steam.

## **Part 2: Strategies that apply to all scenarios**

Remember the second reason for crying, to release stress? The following is called "Crying In Arms" (CIA). It is not "Cry It Out," it is very different (more on this in my "Getting Started with CIA" class).

### **#1 Try bedtime/daytime CIA as much as you can**

- How to do CIA
  - o Always check basic needs first
  - o Allow fussing/crying
  - o Hold your baby in your arms
  - o Make eye contact available
  - o No need to fix it! (bounce, rock, nurse if not hungry, "shh," etc)
  - o Mobile babies/toddlers don't always want to be held (if not, you may need to reach out about this, there are different ways to work with this depending on what's happening)
- Many parents find it easier to start at bedtime. But you can do CIA at any time of day/night.

### **#2 CIA overnight:**

- I KNOW it feels easier to nurse back to sleep. This can come back to haunt you later! It's not that nursing is bad, it's that we want to address the true need.
- Pick a night and decide to do it
- Or pick a waking you feel comfortable with

- Or alternate wakings between CIA and whatever you usually do
- Or go all out and do as many CIA's as needed in one night

#### **A note about pacing**

- Cries have a cycle (build up, peak, slowing or stop)
- Important to respect your triggers
- The more a full cycle can come out, the quicker you'll see 'the other side' (the resolution)
- But it's also important to honor your pace
- Give it several attempts over a week or two or three.

### **Part 3: Specific scenarios**

#### **Newborn and first trimester**

Goes to sleep fine, but wakes

Difficult to get to sleep AND wakes

Several wakings (every 30 min to 2 hrs)

Baby wakes and cries. Instant pick her up, stops and back to sleep. Instant put back down, wakes/cries again.

Wakes frequently to nurse; tend to nurse back to sleep; comfort nursing; human pacifier

Will wake and/or cry if they don't stay latched; human pacifier

Pacifier overnight

Obvious not hungry, wants comfort

NOT obvious whether hungry or not

Wakes crying, screaming, scared, or disoriented (not toddler nightmares/terrors)

Wakes and wants to play

Sleeping arrangement crib, wakes

Sleeping arrangement cosleep, wakes

Toddler nightmares & night terrors

Already tried CIA, but it's not working; Doing CIA at bedtime, still wakes; Or initial progress, then backtrack

### **Part 4: FAQs and wrap up**

#### **What's appropriate—how often my baby/toddler should be waking (or not)?**

- I don't have an exact answer for you because that's your child's call and there are many factors. They need to feel safe. Some will sleep through. Some will still wake and need you 1 to 3 times.
- Also depends what's going on developmentally, solids, if stress in household, etc.
- Aletha says babies 6 mo and older may wake once for hunger; if more than that, the reason is likely something else (stress, illness, closeness).

- I find there's not one consistent pattern, that many families see more than 1 waking, and the other need isn't always immediately obvious.

### How long do cry releases last?

- Catch-up crying vs current moment
- Long at first, can be 30 to 60 min several times
- If waking is 'just' feelings release, within a day to a few weeks, you'll see:
  - o Amount of crying reduce
  - o Some kind of shift (such as sleep, demeanor, more independent play)
- It's not neverending!
  - o Exception: constant stressor (such as body tension, food intolerance, constant marital difficulties, a big move, etc)

### What should I do about waking at 4 or 5 am?

- Very VERY common! We all sleep lighter at this timing
- First, try CIA if needed
- Second, closeness can be key. If you don't already cosleep, consider bringing baby to bed with you at this timing.
- *Aside from those things, here are my honest observations (this is NOT from Aletha)*
  - o If you've already implemented CIA, but this is the one consistent challenge: CIA *at this timing* doesn't always change things
  - o This waking can still happen regardless (CIA or never tried, cosleep or crib, etc)
  - o What's your instinct? Try dark room, white noise, *do what makes sense to you.*
  - o Other than everything else this class has covered, I personally am holding no specific recommendations over this timing until I see further evidence.

### When to reach out

- Finding it difficult to listen to your baby crying, tend to struggle with worry or be anxious
- Not sure if you're doing it right or just want support
- Can't tell if it's hunger vs pain vs releasing feelings
- Tried these things and it's not working
  - o If you had stressful birth/early experiences (from your or baby's perspective), sometimes takes a little more than just CIA, need more help processing those experiences.
  - o It can be other things as well. I can help you sort all these things out.
- Gut feelings/questions

### Wrap up

- Once you start process, give it time
- Changes happen anywhere from immediately to a couple months. We're working with your child as a whole person, state of being, and habits. Those things don't always change so fast.
- Yes this process may take longer at first; but as your child works through old feelings and you establish this way of communicating, tends to make things much easier in the long run

 You're not failing! 

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