



Why Babies Fight Sleep: Bedtime & Naptime Troubles

Part 1: The information you need first

*There's a reason your child is having difficulty with bedtime and/or naps. This approach comes from **Aware Parenting** (Aletha Solter, Ph.D). It's about identifying the underlying reasons behind what your child is experiencing.*

It's about more than just sleep. This is really a communication process. You'll gain much insight about what your baby or toddler 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!

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

Sleep is a state (not a skill!)

- State of consciousness
- Innate biological function for survival
- 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.

#1 cause of bedtime and nap troubles: pent up big feelings or stress

- This isn't "bad", doesn't mean you're a terrible parent. Very normal and healthy.
- Your child innately knows that in order to sleep, must relax; in order to relax, might need to let off steam
- "Teaching sleep" does not solve this problem because it doesn't address the need.

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. 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
- **"Fighting sleep"** is actually 1) those feelings trying to get out, or 2) baby fighting to keep the feelings in

Why sleep associations happen

- Whatever becomes the favorite go-to when Baby cries easily becomes a learned emotional habit/go-to for *Baby*.
- It's the *feelings* (which arise when tired) that become associated.

Crying isn't the problem—it's a solution (in arms)!

Part 2: Strategies that apply to all scenarios

Falling asleep "on their own"

Closeness at falling asleep time is a legit biological need.

So you may still need to hold/stay with your child while falling asleep. The difference is, you don't have to do anything to get them to sleep—while honoring need for closeness.

Crying in Arms (CIA) How-To

1 Watch for signals of pent up feelings/stress

2 Stress release process; how babies naturally relax

CIA basics

- Hold in arms
- Provide eye contact
- No need to fix it! (bounce, rock, nurse if not hungry, "shh", etc)
- If mobile...

If won't easily release-cry

- Are you doing anything that if you didn't, would cry?
- Is there a boundary to establish?
- Keep inviting and holding space.

Do babies cry because they're tired?

No, not exactly—but yes it's related.

The way to meet need for being sleepy: sleep. Way to meet need for letting out feelings or to communicate: cry/upset.

A note about pacing

What to expect

May sleep happily ever after.

May take a while to shift.

May continue having challenges—what this means

Give it several attempts over a week or two or three.

Part 3: Strategies that apply to all scenarios

See webpage for specific videos and timecodes

Baby/toddler won't go to sleep unless you (fill in the blank)

Baby won't stop crying or can't settle

Toddler won't settle down; seems sleepy, but becomes active, agitated, or high strung

Toddler wants to stay up and play (but doesn't seem tense or 'busy')

Tantrums, screaming, or aggression before bedtime

Toddler is demanding, bossy, keeps needing something

Falls asleep fine, wakes later

Baby or toddler takes forever to go to sleep

Trying to do CIA, but baby/toddler *won't* cry (includes sucking thumb)

Does not want to be held for CIA or to go to sleep

Baby won't let you put him/her down

Falls asleep fine, can't transfer / Wake every time put in crib

Yo-yo: fall asleep, transfer, wake, repeat

Baby/toddler fine as long as you're there, upset when you leave

Toddler won't stay in bed/room unless you stay too

Won't sleep in the crib

Will sleep, but only w pacifier

Nursing to sleep & weaning

Will only CIA with dad

Questioning whether it's need to CIA vs something else

You feel triggered by your child's resistance or not having time to yourself

Bonus tip: Positioning/handling tip for transferring

These things turn on the nervous system (waking when transferring)

- Bracing/tension
- Startle

What you can do to avoid those

Part 4: Naps

The information you need

Sleep cycles

Amount of sleep AwP babies/toddlers need

How to know when dropping a nap

Specific Scenarios

0:00 Won't nap unless held

8:25 Can be put down, but won't sleep as long / Sleeps longer if held

10:50 "Cat nap": wakes up after 10-20 min

13:30 Short nap: wakes up after 30-45 min

16:40 Naps aren't consistent, you "never know"

22:20 Wakes up from naps crying

28:20 Skipping naps, but not rested, still tired/grumpy

33:40 Difficulty letting go and falling asleep

Part 5: FAQs and wrap up

FAQs

How long do cry releases last?

Isn't all crying bad?

If I don't nurse, am I withholding nourishment?

What about routines?

What sleeping arrangements do you recommend?

If we choose to cosleep/bed share now, will my child ever grow out of it?

How does high sensitivity (HSP) affect the process of going to sleep?

I tried what you suggested. Why isn't it working?

When to reach out

- Feels like it's not working
- Not sure if you're doing it right
- Want support
- Gut feelings...
- You try this but no resolution

Signals your child may be processing birth story/early experiences

Wrap up

What if you have initial success, then it seems like things are going backwards

Foundational for sleep and ongoing relationship!

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