

Professional Practice: Safer sleep and sleep routines of babies, toddlers and preschool aged children.

Safer Sleep Week 2026 runs from 9th to 15th March 2026, to encourage keeping sleep spaces simple and safe. Run by The Lullaby Trust, this annual national campaign aims to raise awareness of SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome) and promote safe sleep practices for babies.

To help promote and share information on safer sleep we will also be sharing some resources straight from the Lullaby Trust, for your own reference and to share with families and friends.

For parents with older children, we will also be sharing some information directly from NHS and sleep charity.

Sleep Cycles & Advised sleep timing:

Babies' sleep cycles are different to adults' and change over the first few years. There are different types of sleep. Broadly speaking, we have:

Active sleep (also called Rapid Eye Movement, or REM), where you wake more easily. Quiet sleep, this is deeper sleep, where the brain is resting. An adult's sleep cycle is usually about 90 minutes. Adults fall quickly into quiet sleep which makes up about three quarters (75-80%) of their sleep cycle, then they move into active sleep which makes up about a quarter (20-25%) of sleep.

Babies' sleep cycles are only one hour long and are opposite to adults. First they fall into active sleep where they can wake more easily, which lasts for about 20 minutes, then they move into the quiet sleep stage where they are sleeping more deeply.

The NHS recommends the following amounts of sleep per each age group:

0–3 Months (Newborns): 8–18 hours daily, waking frequently to feed.

4–12 Months: 12–16 hours daily. By 6–12 months, some babies may sleep ~15 hours, with fewer night feeds.

1–2 Years (Toddlers): 11–14 hours daily, typically including daytime naps.

3 years - daytime: 0 to 45 minutes and night-time: 11 hours 30 minutes to 12 hours

4 years - night-time: 11 hours 30 minutes

5 years - night-time: 11 hours

The term "autonomic" refers to the part of the nervous system that controls involuntary or unconscious functions of the body, such as heart and respiratory rate (breathing).

"Arousal" is the ability to wake from sleep. It's an important survival response that means you can wake up in a life-threatening situation. For a baby, this could mean waking up and moving their head if their face gets covered by a blanket, for example.

The autonomic nervous system during arousal is similar to 'fight or flight'. It can allow the baby to take a deep breath or sigh, wake up or move if they need to.

There are a lot of products available which claim to help your baby sleep better, and well-meaning friends and family might give you advice to help your baby sleep longer. But this advice may be harmful.

Encouraging babies to sleep for longer and more deeply than is usual for their stage of development may affect their ability to wake up if something is wrong, such as if their mouth and nose become covered. This is a risk for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Preschool aged children help for sleep:

Good sleep routines are important for your preschool child's growth, development and concentration. Whilst nutrition and physical activity are both important, sleep is vital. From an early age it's important to introduce a good sleep routine into your child's life.

Toddlers and preschoolers require 10 to 14 hours of sleep every day. Naps are a great way to ensure your child is rested and ready to face the day. By having a set routine, your toddler is less likely to resist taking a nap during the day. You will need to figure out the correct balance of naps and sleep for your child and family lifestyle.

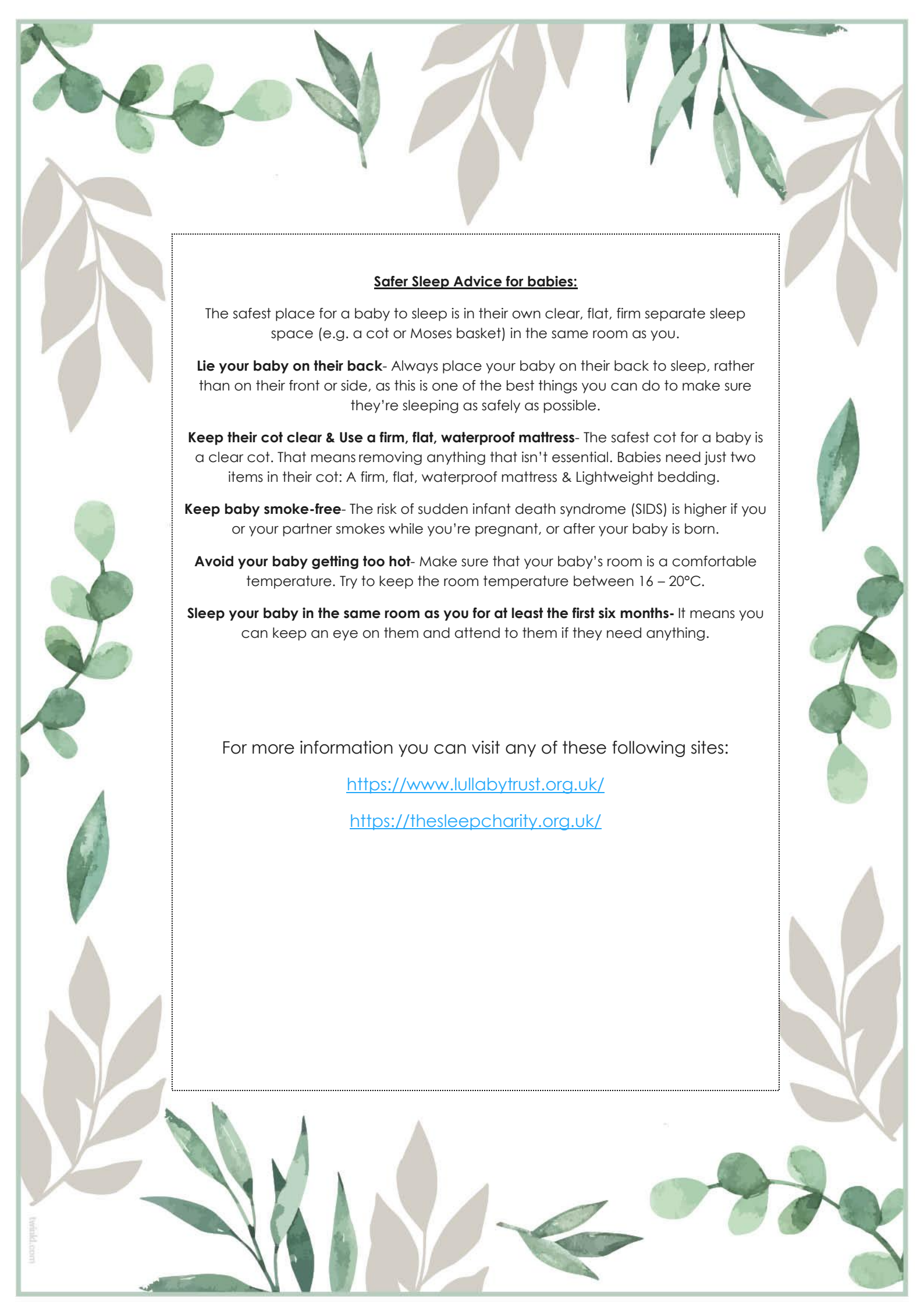
If your child is getting too much sleep during the day, it can impact how well they sleep at night. Try to make sure that naps are before 3pm. This will help make sure your child is tired enough when bedtime comes around.

Some ways you can help your child wind down, ready for bed:

Dim the lights and switch off devices such as the TV, games consoles, computers, and tablets 1 hour before bedtime. The blue light from the screens will keep your child's brain awake for longer.

During the hour before bed, encourage quiet offline activities such as reading a book, playing with Lego, or colouring.

Listening to calm music or white noise can calm some children.

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Safer Sleep Advice for babies:

The safest place for a baby to sleep is in their own clear, flat, firm separate sleep space (e.g. a cot or Moses basket) in the same room as you.

Lie your baby on their back- Always place your baby on their back to sleep, rather than on their front or side, as this is one of the best things you can do to make sure they're sleeping as safely as possible.

Keep their cot clear & Use a firm, flat, waterproof mattress- The safest cot for a baby is a clear cot. That means removing anything that isn't essential. Babies need just two items in their cot: A firm, flat, waterproof mattress & Lightweight bedding.

Keep baby smoke-free- The risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is higher if you or your partner smokes while you're pregnant, or after your baby is born.

Avoid your baby getting too hot- Make sure that your baby's room is a comfortable temperature. Try to keep the room temperature between 16 – 20°C.

Sleep your baby in the same room as you for at least the first six months- It means you can keep an eye on them and attend to them if they need anything.

For more information you can visit any of these following sites:

<https://www.lullabytrust.org.uk/>

<https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/>