



William J. Mesibov MD, FAAP Stuart J. Altman MD, FAAP Linda H. Jacobs MD, FAAP Lauren Brunn MD, FAAP

575 Underhill Boulevard Syosset, New York 11791 516.921.2122 www.kidfixer.com

Sleep Training your Baby: The Ferber Method

From "What to Expect"

You've made the decision to sleep train your baby so you can (finally!) start getting a little more shut-eye yourself. If you're looking into different plans and approaches, the Ferber method might be on your list of possible contenders. The Ferber method of sleep training has been around for more than three decades, and it's helped countless little ones learn how to drift off to dreamland on their own. So should you give "Ferberizing" a try?

Here's how the Ferber method works and exactly how to do it, along with some smart tips that will help your baby get the hang of falling asleep solo sooner.

What is the Ferber method?

The Ferber method is a form of cry it out sleep training (also known as "graduated extinction") developed by pediatric sleep expert Dr. Richard Ferber. It teaches babies to self-soothe, so they can fall asleep on their own — and fall back to sleep when they wake up during the night.

Some parents who sleep train with cry it out opt not to go back into their baby's room at all, even if the baby cries for a long time. The Ferber method is considered to be a gentler option, since it involves periodically checking in on your baby when she's crying.

During the check-ins, you'll go to your baby at timed intervals that gradually get longer until she falls asleep. The check-ins also get longer on subsequent nights. Ferber calls it the "progressive waiting approach." You can soothe your baby verbally or give her a gentle rub or pat. But you shouldn't pick her up or feed her, and your visits should only last a minute or two.

How do you do the Ferber method?

Even though sleep training can sometimes feel hard emotionally, the actual steps of the Ferber method are simple and straightforward. Here's what you'll do:

- After your bedtime routine, put your baby into her crib. She should be drowsy but awake.
- Tell your baby goodnight and leave the room.
- If your baby cries, wait for a set amount of time (more on how long below), then go back in to briefly comfort her by talking in a soothing voice or gently patting her. Don't pick her up or feed her.
- Leave the room and repeat as needed if your baby continues to cry, going back in to reassure her at specific timed intervals.

When should you start the Ferber method on your baby?

Babies are generally ready for sleep training, including methods like Ferber, around 5 or 6 months. At that point, they're developmentally capable of self-soothing. They're also old enough to sleep through the night without feeding.

But you don't have to sleep train as soon as your baby hits the 5- or 6-month mark. If you'd feel more comfortable holding off until your little one is a bit older, that's okay. Just keep in mind that the older your baby gets, the harder it might be for her to learn to fall asleep on her own instead of being rocked, fed or soothed by you.

Ferber method chart

The Ferber method is considered a gentler form of cry it out sleep training, since it lets you check in on your baby at timed intervals to comfort her (with soft words and touches) when she's crying.

In his book *Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems* (which parents trying this method might want to borrow or buy), Ferber recommends doing check-ins at the following times:

Day 1

First check-in after: 3 minutes
Second check-in after: 5 minutes
Third check-in after: 10 minutes
Subsequent check-in after: 10 minutes

Day 2

First check-in after: 5 minutes
Second check-in after: 10 minutes
Third check-in after: 12 minutes
Subsequent check-in after: 12 minutes

Day 3

First check-in after: 10 minutes
Second check-in after: 12 minutes
Third check-in after: 15 minutes
Subsequent check-in after: 15 minutes

Day 4

First check-in after: 12 minutes
Second check-in after: 15 minutes
Third check-in after: 17 minutes
Subsequent check-in after: 17 minutes

Day 5

First check-in after: 15 minutes
Second check-in after: 17 minutes
Third check-in after: 20 minutes
Subsequent check-in after: 20 minutes

Day 6

First check-in after: 17 minutes
Second check-in after: 20 minutes
Third check-in after: 25 minutes
Subsequent check-in after: 25 minutes

Day 7

First check-in after: 20 minutes
Second check-in after: 25 minutes
Third check-in after: 30 minutes
Subsequent check-in after: 30 minutes

Do you have to follow these times exactly in order for the training to work? Having predetermined check-in times can help ensure that you're consistent and gradually encourage your baby to do more of the work of soothing herself.

But it's okay to alter the intervals a little bit if you think something else would work better for you and your baby. The key is sticking with any changes you make. As long as you're consistent, you should see sleep training success.

How long does the Ferber sleep method take to work on your baby?

All babies respond to sleep training in their own way, and some take to the new bedtime routine a little faster than others. But in general, you can expect the crying to diminish steadily over three nights or so. And sometime between nights four and seven, it will likely stop altogether. (Hooray!)

Does that mean your baby will never cry at bedtime or wake up in the middle of the night again? Even after sleep training, it's normal for your little one to hit the occasional rough patch — like when she's sick. But now that sleep training has given her a solid foundation, it should be relatively easy for her to get back to her usual snooze routine once the issue has passed.

Ferber sleep method training tips

The sleep training process isn't exactly fun, but it doesn't have to be a nightmare either. To set the stage for success — and maybe have everyone sleeping blissfully through the night a little sooner — keep these strategies in mind.

- Be smart about your start time. Sleep training can be a big deal for both you and your baby, so block out time on the calendar when everything else is relatively calm. If your little one is sick or teething, or if you've got a new babysitter starting or you're going back to work, it's worth holding off until things have settled back down. Avoid sleep training on vacation too — travel will only derail your efforts.

- Wean nighttime feedings. It can be harder for your baby to get the hang of sleep training if you sometimes respond to her cries by going in to feed her.

- Establish a bedtime routine, if you haven't already. Soothing activities like a bath, book and snuggles will help your baby wind down for the night. If your bedtime routine currently ends with a feeding, try moving it earlier so there's no risk of your baby falling asleep at the breast or bottle. Remember, she should be drowsy but awake when you put her in the crib.

- Watch for your baby's sleepy cues. You want to get your baby into bed when she's nice and tired — but not overtired. Your little one will have a harder time settling down once she's past the point of exhaustion. And she might be more likely to sleep restlessly and wake throughout the night.

- Stick with the crib for bedtime and naps. At night, the crib is the most obvious place for sleep. But if your baby is in the habit of napping in places other than her crib, she might have a harder time sleeping well in it at night too.

- Make sure both parents are on board and consider having your partner handle check-ins. It's important that both you and your partner agree to try the Ferber method of sleep training, as you'll need each other for support during the process. And if your baby associates you with feeding and comfort, having Dad or a partner go in might help her settle down a little easier.

- Be consistent. Listening to your baby cry can be hard, and it might even tempt you to abandon your plan. But sticking with it will help her get the hang of things faster — so you all can rest easier.

When to stop trying the Ferber method

Cry it out methods like the Ferber method can be a great tool for helping babies become great sleepers. But if after a week or two, your baby hasn't made much progress or it seems like she's still crying a lot, it might be time to take a break. You could try the Ferber method again a little later on, or switch gears and try another sleep training approach. It's also worth talking with your baby's pediatrician. She can help rule out any underlying issues that might be making it harder for your baby to sleep, like reflux or an ear infection.

The Ferber method of sleep training can help your baby learn how to fall asleep on her own and soothe herself back to sleep when she wakes during the night. As with most sleep training approaches, there will probably be some tears. But if you're consistent, the crying will decrease after just a few days. And within a week or two she — and you — will be getting a better night's sleep.

