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The Ferber Method of Sleep Training As explained in “The Bump”

When you have a baby, you’re never going to be as well-rested as you were at pretty much any other time in your life. While most parents are okay with that for a while, there comes a point where you’re ready for some solid sleep already. Unfortunately, many babies are just fine with waking up during the night until you teach them otherwise. That’s why many parents turn to the Ferber method, a form of sleep training that encourages babies to sleep through the night.

You’ve probably heard of the Ferber method at some point but might be hazy on the details. Here’s what you need to know about Ferber sleep training, so you—and baby—can start catching more Zzz’s.

WHAT IS THE FERBER METHOD, EXACTLY?

The Ferber method is a “cry-it-out” method of sleep training, based on the best-selling book by Richard Ferber, MD. In the book, Ferber discusses the importance of sleep associations. “The conditions that help a baby fall asleep at night are the same conditions required to put a baby back to sleep after night awakenings,” says Whitney Schutzbank, MD, MPH, a pediatrician at the MassGeneral Hospital for Children in Boston. Ferber encourages parents to remove those conditions—which baby learns to associate with sleep, like feeding or rocking—so that babies will learn to put themselves to bed without their parents’ help.

Of course, babies would rather have your help falling asleep, so they’ll often cry at bedtime or in the middle of the night while learning to put themselves to bed. “According to Ferber, the fastest and most efficient way to teach your children to sleep through the night is to let them cry at these times,” Schutzbank says.

WHEN TO START THE FERBER METHOD

Sleep training (whether it’s the Ferber method or any type) is not recommended for babies until they’re about 6 months old. Babies need to eat in the middle of the night before then. But it’s also best to sleep-train before your baby is a year old. After a year, they have a whole bunch of habits and patterns set and it can be harder to break them.

FERBER SLEEP TRAINING, STEP BY STEP

The Ferber method lays out a very specific, progressive regimen for getting baby to sleep at night. If baby has been sleeping in your room until this point (which is advised by the American Academy of Pediatrics for at least the first six months), it's time to move her into her own room in a crib. Then, start Ferber sleep training.

- **Create a bedtime routine for baby.** Read him a book, sing to him or rock him—but make sure he's still awake when you put him to bed.
- **Put baby to sleep in her room.** It should be dark and quiet, Schutzbank says.
- Check in at regular but increasingly longer intervals if baby cries. Generally, Ferber sleep training recommends checking on baby after three minutes, then five minutes and then 10 minutes on the first day. On the second day, check in after five minutes, 10 minutes and 12 minutes. That goes up to 10 minutes on day three and increases from there, up to 20 minutes for the first check-in on day seven. This process is known as *“gradual extinction.”* During those check-ins, reassure baby by patting him gently without picking him up, then leave the room before he falls asleep. Soon enough, baby should get the hang of it. “Usually after about five to seven days, the interval of time spent crying is much shorter, and your child will be putting himself to sleep and sleeping for much longer periods of time at night.

The Ferber method consists of a very specific set of instructions, outlined in the book (see chart below), and it's most effective when it's followed exactly as described. But it can also be personalized if you feel the precise time frames aren't right for your family. Just be aware that changing things up—particularly checking on baby more frequently.

Below is a chart which covers the schedule as described above:

| HOW MANY MINUTES TO LET BABY CRY BEFORE CHECKING IN | | | | |
|---|---------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|
| DAY | AT FIRST WAIT | SECOND WAIT | THIRD WAIT | SUBSEQUENT WAIT |
| 1 | 3 | 5 | 10 | 10 |
| 2 | 5 | 10 | 12 | 12 |
| 3 | 10 | 12 | 15 | 15 |
| 4 | 12 | 15 | 17 | 17 |
| 5 | 15 | 17 | 20 | 20 |
| 6 | 17 | 20 | 25 | 25 |
| 7 | 20 | 25 | 30 | 30 |

SOURCE: SOLVE YOUR CHILD'S SLEEP PROBLEMS, BY RICHARD FERBER MD

the **BUMP**

