

Ep #12: Everything You Need To Know about Sleep Training

PARENTHOOD PREP

with

Devon Clement



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Devon Clement

Ep #12: Everything You Need To Know about Sleep Training

Sleep training is probably a term you've heard a ton, whether you're a parent or not. But certainly when you're becoming a parent, it's a big topic that everybody talks about. Today, we're going to talk about what the heck it is, when you should do it, and why you may or may not want to.

Welcome to *Parenthood Prep*, the only show that helps sleep-deprived parents and overwhelmed parents-to-be successfully navigate those all-important early years with their baby, toddler, and child. If you are ready to provide the best care for your newborn, manage those toddler tantrums, and grow with your child, you're in the right place. Now here's your host, baby and parenting expert, Devon Clement.

Hello, and welcome back to *Parenthood Prep*, the podcast that prepares you for parenthood. Today, I am going to talk about one of my favorite topics, which is sleep training. Such a huge topic that I think people have so many questions about and so many opinions. A lot of the time, I think there's not even a lot of clarity around what it is. So, we are going to talk about all of that today, and I cannot wait.

I hope you all are enjoying this beginning of summer; warm days, starting to get excited about summer activities, maybe school being out, maybe vacation plans. When you are listening to this, I will actually be in London because we are doing a little trip over to Europe for a week, which I'm very excited about. I leave tonight, so I'm recording these episodes in advance. I can't wait to tell you all about it when I get back.

Sleep training, when should you do it? What is it? How should you do it? This is something we are going to talk about endlessly in future episodes, as well as today because I think there's just so much to it. But at the same time, it's such a simple, straightforward thing, the actual definition. So, before we get into when should you do it, what should you do, how should you do it, let's define what sleep training is.

Sleep training is when a person, a baby, a child, even an adult, learns to fall asleep on their own. They figure out what they need in order to be able to get

Ep #12: Everything You Need To Know about Sleep Training

themselves to sleep, and then they practice it until they're able to do it. All it is, is learning a new skill. It's not beating them into submission. It's not making them do something that's not developmentally appropriate.

We are all sleep trained to an extent. In fact, your baby, even if they're not falling asleep on their own, are trained now to fall asleep in the way that they've been falling asleep. We develop habits, we develop routines. Most adults sleep in a bed, you sleep with a pillow and a blanket. And when you go to a hotel, there's a pillow and a blanket there.

It might not be your exact same ones, it might be a little bit of an adjustment. But you can expect that anywhere you're going to sleep, you're likely going to have a soft surface to lie down on and you're going to have a pillow and a blanket to sleep with. And that's what we're used to as adults. If you went somewhere and they were like, "Okay, you have to sleep on the floor," and it's rock hard and there are no pillows or blankets, you would have a hard time falling asleep because it's not what you're used to. It's not what's familiar.

So, we have all been trained to sleep in a certain way. We might sleep in a certain position. You might need a certain side of the bed. You might need the room to be dark. You might need white noise. You might think that you need to fall asleep with the television on; I have some opinions about that. But we are all trained to fall asleep a certain way.

And you don't generally have to call your mom to come over and rub your back until you fall asleep as a grown adult, because at some point, you learned how to fall asleep without that. We want babies and kids to have that skill. That was a kitten. You might hear some meowing. They're getting so big. So we want babies and kids to have that skill of being able to fall asleep on their own.

Now, do human beings sleep solid all through the night without waking up or going into any lighter sleep cycle or doing anything? Of course not. We wake up all the time. I have a Fitbit watch and it tells me multiple times during the night that I woke up. And a lot of them I don't even remember. Some of them I do. Sometimes I looked at the clock to see what time it was, or I got woken up by a

Ep #12: Everything You Need To Know about Sleep Training

noise or a kitten, or I had to pee or whatever. And then, I went right back to sleep.

That is what sleep training is, it is helping kids develop the ability to fall asleep on their own so that when they get these disruptions during the night or go through a lighter sleep cycle, they're able to fall back asleep. And this is totally understandable. I would never tell anybody to sleep train a baby right out of the gate.

Of course, they're going to fall asleep feeding. Of course, they're going to fall asleep in your arms. Of course, you're going to rock them to sleep. It's wonderful to do that. Of course, they're going to fall asleep in the stroller or in the car. But when that's the only way they can ever fall asleep, we want to start to teach them new ways and different ways to do that.

When do we do that? Really, whenever. Honestly, there's so much debate about when is it okay to sleep train. What I have always said is you can always do something. Am I going to take a four-week-old baby and put them in their room and shut the door and not go in for 12 hours? Of course not. But am I maybe going to take that four-week-old baby, that's fed and change, and satisfied and still awake, and lay them down in their bassinet or in the crib, and see what happens? Yeah, I'm going to try that.

And you know what? A lot of the time they fall asleep. They just do, because we haven't trained them not to. Which is what ends up happening sometimes, as well. For the first couple of weeks, of course, you want to feed them whenever you want to feed them; really frequently. Make sure they're gaining weight, make sure they're learning how to digest and all that.

But once you get that okay from the pediatrician that they can go a longer stretch, maybe overnight you're going to start trying to see how long you can get them to go between feedings with just some soothing or rocking, or cuddling or a pacifier. And not necessarily feeding back to sleep, so that they're not eating every two hours throughout the night for the first six months or a year of their life.

Ep #12: Everything You Need To Know about Sleep Training

There's always something you can do. It's always a good idea to start creating good habits, creating routines. I've talked about this in other episodes. Starting a bedtime routine. Getting the whole house calmed down. You can do that the day you come home; getting everybody wound down and starting to get settled for bed. All of these things are part of the bigger picture of sleep and sleep training. You're learning how to do all these things.

And listen, there are parents out there who are like, "I'm not going to sleep train my kids. I'm going to feed them on demand and let them fall asleep on my boob all the time." Guess what? that's also sleep training. You're training them that that's how they fall asleep. You're training them that when they wake up in the middle of the night, they'll be able to have that again. That's totally fine, if that's what you want to do. But don't say you're not sleep training, because you are.

Now, what's another great time to sleep train? When you determine that you have a goal or that there's a problem. Is it a problem that your mother-in-law tells you that you're picking the baby up too much? Or that the kids are sleeping too much? Which is one that I don't understand at all, why that would be an issue. Is it a problem that your neighbor's baby is doing something different than your baby? No, it's not.

These are the things that are a problem. Number one, putting your baby or your kid down for bed takes forever. It's unpredictable. It's a three-ring circus. They fall asleep; you transfer them to the crib; they wake up; you have to go through the whole rigmarole again.

You might have to repeat that process anywhere from 2-10 times. Maybe they fall asleep, and they sleep for 15 minutes, and they wake up and then you have to start the whole process again. That is a sign, that is a red flag that something needs to change. That you need to work on that bedtime.

It's also a problem if only one person can do the bedtime, or the bedtime can only be done in one place. That it's not something that another caregiver could do, whether it's the other parent or a nanny, or babysitter or grandma, or

Ep #12: Everything You Need To Know about Sleep Training

whoever. If that bedtime routine does not transfer to other people or other locations, that's something that I would watch out for. That's a red flag for me.

Because you might think now, "Oh, well, I'm going to do bedtime with my baby every night for the rest of your life." But that's not realistic. And frankly, it's not really what you're going to want. Down the road, you may want to go out some night. You may want to leave your baby with a babysitter. You may want to leave them with the other parent.

And really, something might happen to you, You might have an emergency and have to go to the hospital. Or sprain your ankle and have to go to the urgent care. And you can't be putting your baby to bed in the middle of the urgent care, so somebody else has to put them to sleep. So, that's something that I would definitely look out for as a red flag.

The last and really biggest red flag is that you're not happy with it. If you are not happy with what's going on with your kid's sleep, that is a sign that you should make a change. You are allowed to change something just because you don't like it. Even if your baby is perfectly happy with the process. Even if everybody else is perfectly happy with the process, but you are not. You are allowed to change that process.

Your wants and needs and feelings are important in this situation, always. It is not selfish to want to be happy with something that you do every evening of your life. And if you're not happy, you should change that.

So, you've decided that there's an issue, and it's time to make a change. Or you have a goal that you want to achieve when it comes to what's developmentally appropriate for your baby, and you want to get on the path there. You have a goal that you want to achieve. You have a problem that you want to solve. How do you solve it? How do you figure out what the problem is?

Well, something that I see people run into a lot when they are thinking about sleep training, or making a change to their baby's sleep, is a concept that my

Ep #12: Everything You Need To Know about Sleep Training

partner introduced me to, in software engineering, called the “XY problem”. You may have heard of this.

Basically, the idea is that someone will call the IT desk, or a help desk or customer service, with a problem and say, “My problem is Y, how do I solve Y?” But the actual problem is something that happened before you even got to Y. So, if we're solving Y we're not actually getting to the root cause. Sometimes Y is not even understandable as a problem because it's a result of something that happened with X; if that makes any sense at all.

What happens a lot of the time when I talk to potential clients, or people who are struggling with their baby's sleep, is that they tell me, “Oh, bedtime’s great. Bedtime is no problem. We rock to sleep. We nurse to sleep. They fall asleep in bed with me. And then I transfer them to the crib, and it's fine. It's the night wake-ups. It's that they wake up during the night, anywhere from one to two to 10 times, and every single time I have to go in and rock them or feed them or do whatever to get them back to sleep.”

I say, “Listen, we cannot fix those night wake-ups without fixing bedtime first.” Because what's happening at bedtime is they're developing this sleep association. We all have sleep associations. Like I said before, ours are pillows, blankets, dark room, fan, maybe having your partner next to you, whatever. And the baby's sleep association is you rocking them, you nursing them, feeding them a bottle, holding the pacifier in their mouth, bouncing on a yoga ball, or patting their back.

Or even, if they're older and they're sleeping in a bed, and you're lying with them, maybe rubbing their back, maybe talking to them, maybe not doing any of those things, maybe just lying there with them in silence in the dark, and they're falling asleep with that thing, whatever it is.

And then, you sneak out of the room; they're asleep. Or you transfer them to the crib; they're asleep. 45 minutes later, or two hours later, they go through a lighter sleep cycle, they wake up a little bit, and they go, “Oh, dad's not here. I'm not being rocked. I don't have a boob in my mouth. I don't have a bottle in my

Ep #12: Everything You Need To Know about Sleep Training

mouth. I don't have a pacifier in my mouth. Aaaah, I don't know how to go back to sleep.”

That is where, if we were just trying to solve that... And I think a lot of times when people try to sleep train, and they start with just that, they're not addressing the root cause. Which is, that the baby needs to be falling asleep, at the beginning of the night, at bedtime, or at the start of the nap, with the conditions that are going to persist throughout the remainder of the night.

So, unless that baby is going to have a bottle in its mouth all night long, we do not want them falling asleep with a bottle in their mouth because they're going to wake up, realize the bottle's gone, and panic.

Have you ever been in a hotel or staying over at a friend's house, and you wake up in the middle of the night and you're like, “Where am I?” Because you don't remember that you're in a different place. And once you get oriented and you realize, “Okay, right, I'm in a hotel,” for that split second your body is like, “I'm not in my bed. Where am I?”

If you fell asleep in your bed and you woke up in the bathtub, you would be shocked. You wouldn't just roll over and go right back to sleep. You would be like, “What's going on?” So, that's what's happening with your baby when they're falling asleep with all of these sleep associations, and then waking up and those things are gone.

So, any issue that you're dealing with sleep, I always want to look at that initial put down, that initial falling asleep. If you're putting your baby down, you're rocking to sleep, you're feeding to sleep or whatever, putting them in the crib, and they're sleeping the whole night, great. Amazing. Good for you. You love doing that? Keep doing it.

But again, if we have evaluated that there's a problem, that the problem is that we have to get up from 1-10 times in the middle of the night and put that baby back to sleep, and we're not happy about it, we're going to want to make a change. So, think about that. What's happening at that initial put down? What's

Ep #12: Everything You Need To Know about Sleep Training

happening at that bedtime? Does my baby know how to fall asleep on their own, not just while being rocked or bounced or with a boob or a bottle or whatever? How are we going to change that?

There are a lot of different things you can do, and we'll talk about them in future episodes, but that is the root of sleep training. That is the definition. That is what I want everyone to understand. It is just simply the ability of a human being to fall asleep on their own, without another person having to do all these things to get them to sleep. And more importantly, to get them back to sleep during the night.

Because once they have that skill that they can fall asleep on their own, they're going to start using it in the middle of the night as well. And then you're really doing great, because not only do you have a baby that you can super easily put down at bedtime, just put them in the crib.

Or as a client of mine said once, "It's so great, I can just drop-kick him into the crib," leave the room, and then know and trust that when they wake up, or they go through a lighter sleep cycle, they're not going to panic because you're gone. They're not going to freak out. They're not going to say, "Aaah, where's Mom? Where's Dad? Where's...? I need them to come back in here and put me back to sleep." "I know how to go back to sleep. I trust myself. I can do that."

So, if you would like to make a change to your baby's sleep, whether because bedtime is a nightmare, or the middle of the night is a nightmare, or you're just not happy about what's happening, you are allowed to do that. And I would encourage you strongly to do that.

If you have any questions about this, or you want some support, please reach out, I would love to help. Follow us on Instagram @happyfamilyafter. You can submit questions that way and get lots of tips, too.

Alright, listen up, folks. We'd love to joke around but it's time to get real. And that real talk, it's all about giving your babies the roasting they deserve. Yep, you

Ep #12: Everything You Need To Know about Sleep Training

heard it right. We're calling for an epic baby roast. We want you to drop a voice note on our website and call out your little ones for their adorable crimes.

Did your baby spit up on your brand-new dress the second you put it on? Or maybe they decided to scream through your sister's wedding vows? We want to hear all the juicy details. Head over to HappyFamilyAfter.com, or hit the link in the show notes. Every page on the site has a button on the side for you to record straight from your phone. Your story might just make it onto an episode of the *Parenthood Prep* podcast. We can't wait to hear.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of *Parenthood Prep*. If you want to learn more about the services Devon offers, as well as access her free monthly newborn care webinars, head on over to www.HappyFamilyAfter.com.