

**Ep #65: Wake Windows Explained:
Stop Stressing and Start Sleeping**

PARENTHOOD PREP

with

Devon Clement



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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What the heck is a wake window and how do I use them to my advantage to get my baby sleeping better? Stay tuned, and even if you think you know everything there is to know about wake windows, you might learn something new.

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 the *Parenthood Prep* podcast. Happy belated Father's Day to all the dads out there, and to all the parents, all the second parents that were celebrating today or that we celebrated on Father's Day.

I have been, we talked about this in the pediatrician interview, I have been really impressed the last few years with how much dads, and I say dads specifically because again, there's so much socialization that goes into one person socialized as a woman, one person socialized as a man, those people coming together as a couple and having a baby.

There's so much socialization baked into that really says, oh, anything the dad does to help with the kids is incredible, and everything the mom does is still somehow not enough. And of course, it's not universally true across the board, but I have seen just so much more, not just involvement, not just "babysitting the kids," which of course is a term we all hate, but really being active, fully involved, fully taking on their share of the mental labor, the emotional labor of parenting. And I think that's so huge and it's so, so necessary. So, you know what, kudos to the moms for making that happen because I know you had a big part in it. And yeah, yay dads. Happy Father's Day.

Happy Father's Day to my dad, who I think possibly invented the dad joke. If he was not the first person to tell them, he has certainly told most of them in his life and in his parenting. So, my personal favorite, which I always say, is when, you know, the server comes over to the table at a restaurant and they tell you, you

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know, whatever, and then they're like, "And if you guys need anything, my name's Steve." and I say, "What's your name if we don't need anything?" Heyo.

Anyway, I think being a dad seems great, and when my partner a few years ago, we were talking about, you know, the future and do we want kids and this and that, and he said, "I really want to be a dad." And I said, "You know what? I really want to be a dad too." It sounds amazing. Like, so much less pressure, stress, even if you are taking on an equal or more major share of the parenting, you're not getting judged, you're not getting criticized, you're getting so much credit and so much support. Like, I want that.

So that is, you know, if we ever become parents, that is how we're going to structure our family, that we're both going to be dads, and it's going to be great. I'm really excited for it.

Speaking of two dads, my very dear friends are having their baby next month. I don't know if I shared this, I think I did. I was their egg donor. So I am going to have a genetic child that is being raised by two other people. And how exciting is that? I just get to be her cool aunt, but also she's going to look like me. It's kind of the perfect situation.

So we had a big baby shower for them last weekend or a couple of weekends ago. Their gestational carrier came. She's wonderful. We're just going to be a whole big, weird, queer family, and I'm so excited for it, and I just cannot wait. So get ready to get sick of me talking about her once she comes in July. I cannot wait.

So, what are we talking about today? Wake windows. What are wake windows? We hear about this a lot. I love how well-researched a lot of my clients and friends are when it comes to babies. I hear words like one sleep cycle or wake windows, things like that, and I know that they've done their research, but I also know that the amount of information out there can be so overwhelming and can really be confusing sometimes. And I think it can be something that people get really attached to as a concept and then sort of misapply it.

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So I want to do a little bit of myth-busting about wake windows. First, I want to explain what they are. I want to go through what to expect at different ages, and then I want to do a little bit of tweaking of what your understanding of wake windows might be and how to improve your baby's sleep and get things to a good place by making some changes to your understanding of wake windows.

So, what is a wake window? It's the amount of time that your baby is awake between sleeps, whether that's between bedtime and the first nap, between naps during the day, between the last nap and bedtime, et cetera. It's the window between the naps; it's the period of time that they're awake. And at different ages, babies can tolerate being awake for different amounts of time.

And this generally, you know, we say every baby is different, but this is something that's pretty developmentally true. So, if you have a brand new newborn baby that's, you know, oh, she's just wide awake all day, she's been awake for three hours, that is not a good thing. We don't want that.

I just saw a very beloved social media popular person who recently had a baby. I'm so happy for them. I'm so happy for her. And I never, ever, ever want to judge people or criticize people or tell people what to do because Lord knows a million people are out there telling you what to do. But she made this video where she was like staring at the baby and the baby was staring back at her, and it was like, this is what we do all day long. And it was so sweet, but that baby looked so tired. Yeah, her eyes were like glassy and she just looked exhausted. So, don't keep your newborn baby awake all day.

Newborns can really be awake for like 30 minutes, maybe 60, and that includes feeding time. So if you're nursing or bottle-feeding your baby, that time counts as awake time, even if they have their eyes closed, even if they seem to be asleep. You should really only have five to 10, maybe 15 minutes of like "playtime" where you're making eye contact or you're shaking a toy in their face because it's so stimulating to them. So that baby should really be asleep most of the day. Their naps will be all different lengths. They'll vary, but they will be just very minimally awake.

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As they get older, as we start to get into what I would say is out of like the very newborn stage, which is around the six-week mark, they can start having slightly longer awake periods, maybe 30 minutes, maybe they're spending a little bit of time chilling in a bouncy chair or a baby seat or starting to use the play mat or starting to do some tummy time. Then they can start to have those longer wake windows where they're maybe alert and stimulated for 15 minutes, 30 minutes, something like that. But we still want to get them put down really quickly.

As we start to approach the 12-week mark or around three months, which is slightly different because that's just the annoying thing about weeks, they don't exactly line up to the months. Your baby is going to be able to be awake longer, like maybe an hour, and they're going to want to have some, you know, chill awake time, some quiet awake time where they're not being stimulated.

So maybe they're sitting in a chair again, maybe they're playing on the play mat, but you're not going to be wanting to be staring at them, talking to them, shaking toys in their face a lot because again, that's still very overstimulating. Their main job is observing the world and looking at you.

Babies, I'm sure you've heard, can only see a certain distance when they're first born and for the first few months, and that distance just happens to be about the distance from your arms to your face or from your breast to your face because even if we are bottle feeding, that's still where we're holding them, where we're cradling them in our arms because that's how we've evolved to work with babies that's where they get fed. And they look at your face and that's about all that they can see. And that's fine. That's what we want.

Now as we start to get into like three, four months, now we're looking at longer wake windows where they can really be awake. Now, you'll read a four-month-old baby can be awake from 60 to 90 minutes or 75 to 120 minutes or something like that. But what does that mean? Do we want the wake windows to be the exact same length all day long? No, we don't. Weirdly, the wake windows are shorter in the morning after they've had a full night's sleep. You would think

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a full night's sleep, they would be raring to go to play for a few hours. It is the opposite.

That morning wake window is going to be the shortest. So that first wake window in the morning at four months, we're looking at about an hour, maybe 90 minutes, but I'm telling you, three, four months, we're looking at an hour. Then that second one might be a little longer, like 90 minutes. As the day goes on, that third or fourth, if you're doing four naps, is going to be more like two hours, 90 minutes to two hours.

Where people get hung up, and I think sort of misinterpret what needs to happen next, is that they use the wake windows all day long the same way they use like a three-hour feeding interval. And I talked about this in the episode about scheduling, which we've actually now run and rerun because it's such a good one.

Go listen to that if you want to hear more about this, but you want your bedtime to be the same time every night. I start a bedtime routine with babies at the same time every night around three weeks, around one month. But if your baby's older and you haven't started a static bedtime yet, start it now because their brains get so latched onto that bedtime and their circadian rhythm becomes set by that.

So, if you're having trouble getting your baby to fall asleep and their bedtimes are all over the place and sometimes they fall asleep quickly, sometimes it takes a long time, if you're sort of waiting to observe them being tired for bedtime, stop doing that. Start having a set bedtime and plan your wake windows around it.

So, I don't care if your four-month-old is up for an hour and 45 minutes or two hours and 15 minutes before bedtime if that bedtime is static. So we don't want to put the baby down for a nap where they're going to wake up an hour before bedtime because that's not long enough, but it doesn't matter to me if it's 15 to 30 minutes one way or the other. They can hang a little bit more when they start to get to be like four or five months old. But do that static bedtime and you will

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find that they are flexible whether the wake window has been a little shorter or a little longer, even when they're younger, and it's totally fine.

It also really helps you to get into a routine. Like if you know that your baby is going to be tucked into bed at 7 p.m. and settled, whether that means they're putting themselves to sleep or you're rocking them to sleep or whatever, and you're out of the room by 7:15, 7:30, guess what? You can have dinner. You can have dinner with your partner. You can spend time with your other kids. You can do stuff that you want to do because you're not like, oh, the baby woke up from a nap at 7:15 and now their wake window is an hour and 45 minutes, so they're going to be awake in the living room until 9 p.m.

That is not what we're doing, okay? And once they're in bed, again, bookend scheduling, once they're in bed for bedtime, they are not getting back up. So even if they wake up a little bit, even if they want another feed or you want to go like spend some time rocking or soothing them, you're not getting up and playing with them.

So, as the day goes on, the wake windows get a little longer, say 15 to 30 minutes longer for each one, but we don't have to get hung up on the exact minute. It is an estimate. It is an idea. We had a client who's lovely, but very anxious, and during sleep training, the baby woke up from a nap, say at 10:13. "Okay, he woke up at 10:13. So, do I put him down at 11:43 or at, you know, 12:13? How long is the wake window that we're giving him?" Babe, chill out.

We put him down, he woke up at 10:13. We're going to call that 10:15, we might even call it 10:00. We're going to put him down at roughly 11:30 and it's going to be fine. It's going to be fine. And for that bedtime, that's going to stay static.

Part of the problem we run into with a lot of our sleep training clients is that they've gotten so over-Googled and read so much information and they're so wound up about things that they're obsessed with wake windows and they're putting their baby to bed at a different time every night, all over the map.

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Like, yes, it's fine if you put him down at 7:00 versus 7:10, but like if some nights he's going down at 7:00, some nights he's going down at 8:30, some nights he's going down at 10:00, some nights he's going down at 6:15, that baby is going to be so confused that you are not going to get good consistent sleep out of them. And you'll probably start to notice that they always wake up at the same time in the morning because they set their circadian rhythms by that overnight time. So then you can start to set their wake windows in the morning.

Now, four or five months, you're still going to be going off of wake windows for naps, but if you have a set bedtime and a set wake up in the morning time, your first nap is going to start to fall into line and be at about the same time every day, which is going to really give you some semblance of a daytime routine, which is great. It might be 40 minutes, it might be two hours, and then you're going to go by wake windows from there, but you're also going to start to set your last nap so that they have a good wake window before bedtime. So really it's only the middle of the day that's going to be kind of all over the place.

By six months, their brains are developed enough that they can really hang a decent amount. That first window might still be 90 minutes, but they can do two, two and a half hours the rest of the day. So, you can start to set their naps by the clock, which is really great. So even if that first nap varies by 30 minutes, you can put them down for that second nap at the same time every day.

If they're taking a third nap, which they a lot of times will do till about nine months, you can set that third nap. You can have a clock schedule where they're feeding and sleeping on the clock. You can have a clock schedule for feeding much earlier, like three, four months, you want to do that. But around six months, you can start following that clock schedule. It may, you know, while you're waiting for it to sort of settle in, you may still have some variability, but you can also push the envelope a little bit and say, okay, these are the times that you're napping, especially if they're sleep trained, especially if they're putting themselves to sleep. You can look at that wake window.

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Now, as they get older, their wake windows are going to get a little longer, two hours, two and a half hours, their naps are going to get a little shorter. You're going to start to see that evolving. But if you have that clock schedule, you'll just start to see, okay, the first nap is getting a little shorter, their second interval is a little longer, their first wake window is a little longer, maybe you push the nap a little later, closer to two hours at around eight or nine months.

If they're taking two super long naps, like I'm talking 90 minutes plus for both naps, they can be on a two-nap schedule before nine months. When we hit that nine-month mark, they'll drop that last cat nap. That last cat nap is really just to bridge the gap to bedtime so that they're not awake for a super long stretch. And around nine months is when they can start being awake for a much longer stretch. So that's when we call the wake windows the 2-3-4. Which is a very cute, catchy way of saying it.

Two hours before the first nap, between wake up and first nap, three hours between first nap and second nap, four hours between second nap and bedtime, 2-3-4. Is it always exactly four hours? Are they always waking up from their last nap at exactly 3:00 and going to bed at exactly 7:00? No, of course not. I find that last interval is more like 3 and a half, maybe even three sometimes. It can be up to four. But saying the 2, 3, 3 and a half is not quite as catchy and pithy, so we say the 2-3-4.

The same way we say a four-hour schedule for four feeds a day, when really it's more like a three and a half to four because there's having the first bottle or their first feed say at 7:00 and their last feed is going to be at like 6:00, 6:30 if we want them down to bed for 7:00. So then each bottle is going to be or each feed is going to be in a little bit of a different window.

The four-feed-a-day schedule is more of a bottle schedule than a nursing schedule, but you can do it with nursing. I do really like it. You just want to make sure that they're really getting enough to feed at each feeding. Especially if they're taking solids, that adds in a little extra, you know, boost to kind of feed

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them in between. I should do an episode about feeding solids. People have so many questions about that.

So that is wake windows. To summarize, don't get hung up on them being exactly the number of minutes, okay? They can be a little bit flexible. They're going to be shorter in the morning, they're going to get longer as the day goes on. They can hang a little longer. They're still going to be pretty variable. You're going to be following a wake window schedule until about six months and that's when you can implement a clock schedule and then keep the clock schedule going forward. They may still be on three naps till about nine months.

I only want a baby under nine months on a two-nap schedule if they're napping like four hours a day in those two naps, which does happen. I'd say maybe a quarter to a third of babies that age are doing two really long good naps and can be up and are getting a really good overnight of sleep. But if they're, you know, not doing that, I would always err on the side of trying to get them a little more sleep than a little less.

So that's wake windows. Short little episode today. And of course, we're here if you have any questions. Have a great day.

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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.