

The Importance of Infant-Safe Sleep Practices for Second Sleep

Barb Himes, CD

first candle

Saving babies. Supporting families.

First Candle's efforts to support families during their most difficult times and provide new answers to help other families avoid the tragedy of the loss of their baby are without parallel.

October marks Infant Safe Sleep Awareness Month and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) Awareness Month and is an excellent time to call attention to a risk that is likely overlooked in infant safe sleep education.

“October marks Infant Safe Sleep Awareness Month and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) Awareness Month and is an excellent time to call attention to a risk that is likely overlooked in infant safe sleep education.”

In May 2022, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released a study (1) of safe sleep practices during infant second sleep among a 1,500 sample of White (65%), Black (12%), and Hispanic (17%) participants, nearly three-fourths of which were

female (74%). Safe sleep criteria followed AAP infant safe sleep guidelines and were defined as supine position, sleep in a separate space, and a crib, bassinet, cradle, or playard.

The study also looked at parental age, race, and ethnicity; first-time parents; homes with smoke exposure; and infants born at 37 weeks.

“The results were sobering. While 44% met all three safe sleep practices at onset, it dropped to 39% reporting having a second-sleep practice, and, of those, 28% met the three criteria at sleep onset, but only 9% met them at both the first and second-time points.”

The results were sobering. While 44% met all three safe sleep practices at onset, it dropped to 39% reporting having a second-sleep practice, and, of those, 28% met the three criteria at sleep onset, but only 9% met them at both the first and second-time points.

As the study authors point out, although nighttime waking is common with infants, less attention appears to be paid to infant second-sleep practices. This matters because sleep-related infant mortality claims 3,500 lives of babies in the United States each year, including sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), accidental suffocation and strangulation in bed (ASSB), and deaths from unknown causes.

The advent of the public health campaign Back to Sleep (now known as Safe to Sleep®) in the 1990s resulted in a 50% drop in the mortality rate between 1994 and 1999 (2), but this rate has since stayed relatively level, and sleep-related Sudden Unexplained Infant Death (SUID) remains the leading cause of death for infants one month to one year of age.

At the core of the Back to Sleep and the subsequent campaigns are the AAP infant sleep guidelines, last updated in 2022, which also specify that in addition to placing infants sleep alone on their



Did you know that premature and low birth weight babies have a 4x greater risk for SIDS?

At First Candle we're educating parents, grandparents and caregivers about safer sleep to make sure all babies reach their first birthday. Learn more at firstcandle.org

backs, the mattress is flat, firm, and level with no bedding, pillows or other items. Infants should share a room with adults during the first six months, but their sleep space should be separate.

“It matters that caregivers and health care providers counsel them to consider that the risks associated with not using safe sleep practices do not diminish from onset sleep to second sleep and may even increase.”

It matters that caregivers and health care providers counsel them to consider that the risks associated with not using safe sleep practices do not diminish from onset sleep to second sleep and may even increase. The study reported that 18% of infants who used a separate space at sleep onset slept with another person after nighttime waking, which can increase the risk of overlay and ASSB.

Understanding family situations, characteristics, and cultural practices also play a role in advancing infant-safe sleep practices. Every family is different, and coming to pre-conclusions about their perspectives on safe sleep can be misleading. The study indicated that parent characteristics, including being under 25, first-time parents, parents identifying as Black non-Hispanic or Hispanic ethnicity, parent education (four-year degree or higher), smoking, and infants born at less than 37 weeks were associated with second-sleep practices after nighttime waking.

“However, results also indicated that households with cigarette smoke exposure and babies born at less than 37 weeks had a lower prevalence of meeting all three safe sleep criteria at sleep onset, which is important because both are at higher risk of sleep-related death.”

However, results also indicated that households with cigarette smoke exposure and babies born at less than 37 weeks had a lower prevalence of meeting all three safe sleep criteria at sleep onset, which is important because both are at higher risk of sleep-related death.

The study authors conclude that the findings “highlight that many parents may benefit from discussion with their pediatrician specifically focused on the importance of continued safe sleep practices after nighttime waking.”

They also conclude, and we agree, that families and their healthcare providers should discuss nighttime wakings and the need for safe sleep practices every time. This is a component of our [Straight Talk for Infant Safe Sleep](#) workshops for healthcare pro-

viders, including nurses, agency workers, doulas, hospital staff, and others, and in our [Let's Talk Community Chats](#) with parents, extended family, and other caregivers.

The first, second, and all-time sleep preparation call for infant-safe sleep practices.

References:

1. Bryan MA, Florence A, Gower AD, Evans YN, Moreno MA. Safe sleep behaviors and factors associated with infant second sleep practices. *Pediatrics*. 2022; <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2021-053935>
2. <https://safetosleep.nichd.nih.gov/activities/SIDS/progress>

Disclosure: The author is a-Certified Doula and the Director of Education and Bereavement Services of First Candle, Inc., a Connecticut-based not-for-profit 501(c)3 corporation.

NT

Corresponding Author



Barb Himes, CD
Director of Education and Bereavement Services
First Candle
49 Locust Avenue, Suite 104
New Canaan CT 06840
Telephone: 1-203-966-1300
For Grief Support: 1-800-221-7437
Email: barb@firstcandle.org
Website: www.firstcandle.org

About First Candle

First Candle, based in New Canaan, CT, is a 501c (3) committed to eliminating Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and other sleep-related infant deaths while providing bereavement support for families who have suffered a loss. Sudden unexpected infant death (SUID), which includes SIDS and accidental suffocation and strangulation in bed (ASSB), remains the leading cause of death for babies one month to one year of age, resulting in 3,600 infant deaths nationwide per year.