



Positive Routine Management™ is a new look at an old problem. It looks at the world of sleep management* from a teacher's perspective.

By assessing a child's issues through five key areas of observation and the use of sleep diaries, it ensures their individual needs are catered for, and each child is managed based on their own unique set of strengths and weaknesses.

These five key areas are as follows;

- ? Sleep requirement and daily routine
- ? Communication
- ? Environment
- ? Independence
- ? Management

Within each key area there are many sub-headings.

Each one of these five areas must be carefully and thoughtfully assessed as they play a vital and intricate role in developing the balance of skills required to resolve a stressed child's sleep time.

By looking at the skill sets within each particular area of need (such as settling, for instance) we are able to identify any weaknesses that may be impacting the child's ability to cope in that particular situation. Once identified, we can look at ways to strengthen these skills at a non-confrontational time of the day so the next time they are exposed to an environment or situation where those skills are required, we have empowered them with the tools they need to feel confident and able to cope in that situation.

A perfect example of this is the ability to cope with being in their cot casually (a quiet play while you put away their clothes, for instance). If we cannot achieve this without stress to the child, sleep management is destined to be heartache all round. Just one single step beyond that simple skill is to assess if your little one can cope with you walking out of the room briefly while they are happily playing in their cot, by using clear verbal input (i.e. "mummy's going to get your water, I'll be back!"). If you can't achieve this basic skill at cot play time when the lights are on and your baby is in good form, how can you expect them to be able to cope at sleep time when their hormone levels and body temperature have dropped, the oxygen supply to their brain is reduced, and it's dark?

Perhaps, the above skill is even an issue when you are loading the dishwasher, cooking or asking your little one to play on the floor for a brief period of time! If so, again, you really couldn't yet consider addressing coping strategies for their cot until you have started equipping them with these coping skills in the main living and play area first.

I have been dubbed The Baby Whisperer, but I don't actually have some mythical power that hypnotises a child to sleep, though it may appear that way sometimes. People can't understand how I can teach any baby to happily and contently sleep in their own bed almost immediately,

even when that same baby had previously screamed for hours on end with attempts of control crying. Parents say to me "How is that possible? How did you just do that? You just talked to them, left them, and now they have gone to sleep? Oh my goodness, I have tried that so many times Sheyne, **WHAT DID YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?!**"

While it does require communication skills, there's so much more involved than that. By the time I put the babies to bed, I have done all the hard work while they were awake, and all while their parents were with them to reassure them. It's this hard but often unnoticed and subtle work that goes into establishing these babies 'emotional tool kits', enabling me to put them to bed with ease. Once these skills have been developed, they enable all the little people I am blessed to work with, to be able to trust me, and confidently adjust to any new situations I introduce them to, without stress. It looks like magic sometimes, but I assure everyone, it is always hard work. Let's face it, anything worthwhile generally is.

I am proud to have maintained a 99% success rate with my sleep management strategies over the last 7 years of my business, and I owe it all to the implementation of this balanced approach, that I have carefully developed over the last 15 years of my career.

Over the coming months I am thrilled to be writing a series of articles for the busy community here at Essentialbaby.com. These writings will empower you with the skills that you need to become a Baby Whisperer within your own family. Ultimately, these skills will enable you to correctly assess your little one's needs, and empower them with the skills they require to be able to go to sleep without stress.

Does this mean there will be no tears? Well this is a great question.

One of the most fundamental rules of my strategy is balance. At no point will you see me swinging the pendulum too far in either direction.

Babies cry. It's normal, natural, and nothing to be frightened of. It's how they talk and communicate with us, and it's how they express themselves. It would not be balanced to expect your baby to never cry, or to always try to stop them experiencing certain aspects of normal life because it might make them cry.

One of the biggest mistakes you can make is to believe that your child's tears are directly proportionate to your abilities or competence as a good parent. In not allowing your little one to cry, you are burdening them to always be happy, when the reality is that we all go through changes in mood as human beings, and that is normal and healthy.

While I am well known for a 'minimal tears solution' at sleep times, again, it's that quiet work through the day that enables each child to experience their own natural feelings and reactions to situations while we are with them to reassure them.

A good example is when we ask a child to lie down and wait while we change their nappy. While this is an essential patience and co-operation skill required for sleep, it is also a skill that often leads to frustration, temper and tears while they learn to cope with this experience. These moments of normal emotional experience are short lived, and should be treated with respect and consistency. As a result, it's often only within one or two nappy changes that the tears are replaced with trust, patience and a new 'taught' strategy to play with a toy while we change their nappy rather than fight with mum or dad.

So, it's important to have those experiences, and sometimes, to even have to work through the tears, but this should always be done in a compassionate, safe and predictable manner, and it should always involve the parents.

Can you imagine the confusion created by a control crying strategy implemented at sleep time, when you continue a different response to their behaviour during the day; i.e. to pick them up every time they cry? This imbalanced approach when communicating with your child could be telling them that their solution for every emotion is you, and you alone, during the day, while at night, your new control crying actions tell them that all the strategies you have empowered them with during the day don't work anymore and they have to work it out on their own. This is often why our precious little people become so terribly upset. This is where Control Crying is unkind and unfair.

On the other hand, just as control crying is inconsiderate; to never expose your child to the normal conditions of their world is equally as destructive. It can inadvertently leave them unempowered, vulnerable and utterly unable to cope without a primary carer resolving even the most basic of emotion. We create patterns of learnt dependency around things that they should be able to start feeling confident about.

Please understand the above statement. I am talking about normal conditions like feeling tired, or it getting dark, or being bored sometimes or having to lie quietly and wait while we change a nappy etc. All these are normal conditions that a child will experience multiple times through each and every day.

Another example of a potentially emotional event to experience that could evoke tears, while they learn to cope, would be helping your little one trust and feel safe in the dark. It would be irresponsible to never expose them to this normal condition of life. Why? Because it's dark for half of our lives.

Imagine your little one is suddenly exposed to a dark environment. They cannot see, and have no concept of what may have occurred to cause this and so they become frightened. Naturally, our immediate response is to remove them from this situation and calm and reassure them.

If, however, the next day you see them acting tentatively to a dimly lit room, we would not want to stagnate them in that feeling of fear, by being frightened of that situation for the child. We would always assess the situation from an adult's perspective, and then reassure them while re-introducing and exposing them to those conditions. Within a few short days your child has learnt to trust the dark, and why? Because you said it was safe by being confident and reassuring whilst in that situation.

As parents, we are given the awesome task of teaching our little ones about the world around them. We have lived and experienced this world already and now it's time to impart our wisdom onto our child. Our children look to us to assess if they are safe or not. A little like a toddler who falls down but does not necessarily hurt herself, but she still looks to her mother or father to determine if she is hurt. The parent's reaction ultimately determines whether the child begins to cry or not. The same goes for anything new - even a new sleep routine.

While sleep is the aim of this strategy, its balanced approach means your little one benefits on so many levels, and a basic confident parenting philosophy can begin to grow.

We have a short window of three to five years to help them develop confidence within their own space, with their own emotions and coping strategies, before they start to spread their wings and

race off to kindergarten to start socialising as little people independent of their parents. This is where we need to ensure we provide balance.

This same principle goes towards sleep and the cot environment.

Children are creatures of habit, they dislike unfamiliar things, so we have developed strategies to prepare them for new situations, and the rest depends on you and on your attitude to their sleep routine. Will you be dreading it? Will they get a warning of 'it's nearly time for sleep mate!' in an apologetic tone from dad? Or a nervous tone from mummy? Or will you be enthusiastic and warm about going to 'their soft, warm cot/bed, that they love, for a lovely sleep time with teddy' and use positive language.

To understand the psychology of sleep means you can start to look at your little ones world from their point of view, and accurately assess how they are coping within certain situations, and, you can start to look at what tools you are empowering your children with to cope with the normal conditions of sleep.

I firmly believe that emotional development and stability is the foundation of all growth and development. Once we have a good solid understanding of the emotional foundation of a strategy we are able to make an educated decision as to whether it fits into our own personal parenting philosophy and therefore begin our research into finding a harmonious and balanced solution to our children's, and indeed the entire family's, sleep time blues.

I look forward to writing and presenting the next instalment, and hope you have found this brief introduction informative. I appreciate the time you took to read through my work.

Warm Regards

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*A basic bench mark to work with, when I refer to sleeping through the night, is that of a healthy, normally developing infant from 6 months to 5 years being able to sleep for 11 to 12 hours through the night, undisturbed and without the need for intervention or milk intake, and varying day sleeps depending on age, stage of development, and individual sleep requirement.

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