

SAFER SLEEP

A practical guide for nannies

Supporting safer starts for babies

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Introduction

Safer sleep is a fundamental part of caring for babies. As a nanny, you may be responsible for settling a baby for several naps throughout the day, establishing sleep routines and helping parents navigate conflicting information about infant sleep.

Your role carries professional responsibility. You need to understand current safer sleep recommendations, check that the sleep environment is appropriate and communicate openly with parents about any concerns.

This guide is intended to support your professional practice. It complements, rather than replaces, the detailed guidance and training provided by The Lullaby Trust and other appropriate health professionals.

This guide is an educational resource for nannies. It does not replace current guidance from The Lullaby Trust, the NHS or advice from an appropriate healthcare professional. Recommendations may be updated, so please check the linked sources regularly.

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The essentials of safer sleep

The key recommendations should be followed for every sleep, including daytime naps.

Back to sleep.
Always place a baby on their back at the start of every sleep. If a baby can independently roll from back to front and back again, follow current NHS guidance on positioning and rolling.

A clear, flat sleep space.
Use a suitable cot, Moses basket or other appropriate sleep space with a firm, flat mattress. The sleep space should be clear of pillows, duvets, cot bumpers, soft toys, loose bedding and sleep positioners.

Room sharing.
The recommendation is for babies to sleep in their own separate sleep space in the same room as an adult for at least the first six months, for daytime and night-time sleep. In a nanny's working day, arrange the sleep space so that you can supervise appropriately while following current guidance.

Keep the baby's head uncovered.
Babies can overheat, so avoid indoor hats and ensure bedding and clothing are appropriate for the room temperature.

Avoid overheating.
The Lullaby Trust recommends a room temperature of 16–20°C. Check the baby's chest or the back of their neck to assess whether they feel too hot, rather than relying on their hands or feet.

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Preparing the sleep environment

Before settling a baby, check the sleep space rather than assuming it is ready to use .

- Is the mattress firm, flat, in good condition and correctly fitted?
- Is the cot or basket clear of unnecessary items?
- Are blankets, if used, securely tucked in and positioned safely?
- Is the baby dressed appropriately for the temperature?
- Are blind cords, cables, monitors and other hazards kept away from the sleep space?
- Can you keep the baby in the same room as the supervising adult, in line with current guidance?
- Are pets and other children prevented from accessing the baby's sleep space?

Do not improvise a sleep space using cushions, nests, beanbags, sofas or adult beds. If you are unsure whether a product or arrangement is suitable, check the current advice from The Lullaby Trust before using it.

Sleeping bags, swaddling and sleep products

Parents may have purchased a range of products intended to help their baby sleep. As a nanny, it is important to distinguish between products that support safer sleep and those that may introduce additional risks.

<u>Baby sleeping bags:</u>

Check that the sleeping bag fits properly around the shoulders, is appropriate for the baby's size and has a suitable tog rating for the room temperature. Do not add loose bedding over a sleeping bag.

<u>Swaddling:</u>

If a family uses swaddling, familiarise yourself with the current guidance. Follow advice about appropriate materials, avoiding overheating and stopping when the baby shows signs of attempting to roll. Never place a swaddled baby to sleep on their front.

<u>Nests, pods, positioners and padded products:</u>

Do not assume that a product is safe because it is marketed for infant sleep. Check The Lullaby Trust's guidance on baby sleeping products and avoid products that conflict with safer sleep recommendations.

<u>Weighted products and inclined sleep surfaces:</u>

Do not introduce weighted sleep products or inclined sleep arrangements as a way to settle a baby.

When in doubt, return to the basic principles: a firm, flat, clear sleep space and placing the baby on their back.

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When a baby falls asleep away from their cot

Babies sometimes fall asleep unexpectedly during the day. Nannies should plan ahead and know how to respond.

In a car seat:

Car seats are designed for travel, not as a routine sleep space. If a baby falls asleep during a journey, transfer them to a suitable, firm, flat sleep surface as soon as you reach your destination and it is safe to do so.

In a pram or pushchair:

Follow the manufacturer's instructions and current safer sleep guidance. Do not assume that every pram, carrycot or seat is suitable for unsupervised sleep. Check that the product is approved for the intended use and that the baby's airway remains clear.

In a sling or carrier:

Follow the relevant safe-use guidance, keeping the baby's face visible and airway clear. A sling should not be treated as a routine substitute for a suitable sleep space.

On a sofa or armchair:

Never deliberately settle a baby to sleep on a sofa or armchair. Falling asleep with a baby on these surfaces is particularly dangerous.

If a baby falls asleep in your arms while feeding or cuddling, remain alert and transfer them to their appropriate sleep space before you need to move away or risk falling asleep yourself.



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Working in partnership with parents

Nannies work within a family's home, and parents may have established routines or preferences around sleep. A professional approach combines respectful communication with a clear commitment to safer care.
Before starting a role, discuss:

- Where the baby will sleep during the day.
- The family's existing sleep routine and settling preferences.
- The products used for sleep and whether they are appropriate.
- Room temperature, clothing and bedding.
- How the family would like sleep information recorded and shared.
- What to do if the usual sleep space is unavailable or unsuitable.

It is helpful to have these conversations before the first day of care, rather than waiting until a concern arises.

What if a parent requests something you are uncomfortable with?

Explain your concern calmly and refer to recognised guidance. You could say:

“I understand this is what you have been doing, but the current safer sleep guidance recommends a different approach. I'd like us to look at The Lullaby Trust's advice together so we can agree on a safe arrangement for the baby.”

Avoid making assumptions or turning the conversation into a confrontation. Keep the focus on the baby's safety and the professional guidance available.

If a parent continues to request an arrangement that conflicts with safer sleep recommendations, document the discussion factually, seek appropriate professional advice and follow your safeguarding responsibilities and the procedures relevant to your role.

Do not knowingly ignore an immediate safety concern.

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Your professional responsibilities

Safer sleep is not a one-off checklist. It is part of everyday care.
As a nanny, you should:

- Keep your knowledge up to date using reliable sources.
- Check the sleep environment before every sleep.
- Follow current evidence-based recommendations.
- Record and communicate relevant information in line with the family's agreed procedures.
- Raise concerns promptly and professionally.
- Seek advice from an appropriate healthcare professional when a baby's individual medical needs affect sleep arrangements.
- Never substitute personal opinion, social media advice or product marketing for recognised guidance.

Some babies may have specific medical needs or individual instructions from their healthcare team. These should be discussed with the parents and relevant professionals, with clear instructions agreed for your care.

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Trusted resources and further learning

The National Nanny Association encourages nannies to access reliable information and relevant training to support their professional practice.

The Lullaby Trust

- Safer sleep guidance
- Safer Sleep Awareness: a guide for childminders, foster carers, nannies and nursery settings
- SIDS and safer sleep training for professionals
- Safer sleep resources for professionals

NHS

- Safer sleep advice for babies
- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)

We encourage nannies to explore relevant training, refresh their knowledge regularly and use these resources when discussing sleep arrangements with families.



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A Final Word from the NNA

Every baby deserves a safe start.

The National Nanny Association is proud to support *The Lullaby Trust's Campaign for Safer Starts* and the *Campaign for Gigi* and its call for action to improve infant safety and ensure families can access reliable information and support.

We have participated in discussions and meetings with Connor Rand MP and Tom Morrison MP as part of this wider work. We will continue to support evidence-based safer sleep practice and encourage professional conversations that put babies' safety first.

Safer sleep is everyone's responsibility.



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