SLEEP AND SETTLING
A reflective workbook for parents

Government of South Australia
Sleep and settling
A reflective workbook for parents

Parent name:

Health worker:

This workbook is designed to help parents, with their health worker, to review the many factors that can influence their baby’s sleep and to strengthen their emotional wellbeing as their baby learns to settle and sleep.

You can use this workbook to help you identify and explore things you would like additional support with, apart from safe sleep strategies and specific settling techniques.

How you use this resource is up to you. You do not need to finish all of it or fill in every section.

Sharing your reflections with your health worker can be helpful.
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More information

Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS)
To make an appointment 1300 733 606
Parent Helpline 1300 364 100
www.cyh.com
Baby sleep cycles

Babies need help to get to sleep, and need much more sleep than their parents.

They also need to sleep in shorter blocks of time, particularly in the early months of their life.

Early on babies have short frequent sleeps throughout the day and it may feel like you are spending all your time settling your baby. Later on they will sleep for longer at night and be awake more during the day.
Sleeping woes

It can be overwhelming if your baby is struggling with sleeping and settling. You may worry that there is something wrong with them.

Conflicting advice about what you should be doing and comparing your baby’s sleep patterns with other babies can all add to your confusion and anxiety.

Talking to someone who just listens can help you to not feel so alone. If you have someone you feel safe with, ask them to listen to your experiences and reflect on what this was like for you.

It can help to write about your experience.
Helping baby settle

Learning how to sleep and settle is something many parents and babies have difficulty with.

Self-settling is one of the most important skills for a baby to develop and they need your help to master it.

Helping your baby to settle involves listening and responding to their cries. The level of comfort you offer should match the level of their distress.

As your baby grows and learns to self-soothe you can encourage them to be more independent when going to sleep.

Most babies do learn how to self-settle, but some need more help than others.

How much help does your baby currently need to get to sleep?

Mark a spot along the line below.

My baby needs:

| Little support | Lots of support |

Which of the below does your baby need to settle?

- [ ] your presence
- [ ] your voice
- [ ] touching and stroking
- [ ] holding
- [ ] movement
- [ ] feeding
- [ ] wrapping.
What different things do other members of the family find work well?

Other thoughts or comments:
Many things can impact on a baby’s ability to learn to settle and sleep. Every baby and family is different and there is often more than ONE reason why a baby does not sleep as well as you would like.

What do you think has been the most significant thing that has affected your baby’s ability to settle and sleep?
Other challenges

Tick the things that you think have made sleep and settling more challenging for you and your baby.

Your baby:

- [ ] lots of household changes
- [ ] health issues
- [ ] separations
- [ ] feeding struggles
- [ ] easily over aroused
- [ ] tension in household
- [ ] prematurity
- [ ] needs of other children

- [ ] lot of different approaches to settling
- [ ] physical illness
- [ ] unclear tired signs
- [ ] other

For you:

- [ ] difficult pregnancy/ birth
- [ ] lots of household changes
- [ ] physical health issues
- [ ] mental health struggles
- [ ] separations
- [ ] feeding struggles
- [ ] difficulty understanding baby’s tired signs
- [ ] difficulty coping with crying baby
- [ ] exhaustion/tiredness
- [ ] expectations of baby at this stage of life

- [ ] difficulty persisting with one approach
- [ ] not knowing what to do
- [ ] little support/ help from others
- [ ] feeling criticised or judged by yourself or others
- [ ] needs of other children or partner
- [ ] other
Noises and cues

Babies make all sorts of noises and cues to communicate with others. As you learn more about your baby you may be able to tell which noises and cues they make when they are tired.

Describe the noises and cues your baby makes when they are tired.

Not all cries are the same and sometimes your baby's cry might mean they need your help to calm down before they can fall asleep.

What do you notice about your baby’s cry around settling times?
Your feelings

Babies are like sponges and absorb your feelings, which is why sometimes someone who is feeling ‘fresh’ may be able to settle your baby when you cannot.

What feelings do you think your baby absorbs from you during settling time?

Tick the words that describe how you feel when your baby is unsettled:

- tired
- frustrated
- supported
- okay
- flat
- lonely
- frightened
- teary
- confused
- a failure
- valued
- anxious
- angry
- calm
- bored
- overwhelmed
- confident
- alone

If you notice that you have ticked a lot of negative feelings you may want to try a brief relaxation self-compassion exercise.

Take a moment to slow down and focus on your breathing - breath in through your nose and out through your nose.

When your thoughts stray just notice the thought and bring yourself back to your breathing…. ‘In and out’.

Once you get into a comfortable rhythm tell yourself something positive that a friend might say to you and repeat these words. It is in moments of brief relaxation that you are more likely to reflect positively and be encouraged in your parenting skills.
Self-settling

Many parents struggle when they leave their baby to self-settle.

Mark a spot on the lines to show your comfort with the below statement:

‘It is ok to put your baby in the cot, awake and not too distressed.’

| Comfortable | NOT comfortable |

Often it can be difficult to provide warmth and connection (including cuddles, holding, stroking), and firmness and control (allowing your baby some space to learn how to self-settle) when settling. The skills your baby gains in self settling will allow you to gradually overtime be less involved in settling your baby to sleep. Your baby will also be able to use these skills to resettle themselves when they awaken.

Put the words ‘firmness, control, warmth, connection’ in order of easiest to hardest for you when self-settling your baby.

1. ___________________________ (Easiest)
2. ___________________________
3. ___________________________
4. ___________________________ (Hardest)

Reflecting on this, what could you change to give you a better balance?
Common problems

Parents often report some of the following as common areas they struggle with.

Mark a spot on the lines to show the level of relevance for you and your baby.

**Misreading your baby as hungry when they are tired leads to over feeding and making them hard to settle.**

![Highly relevant](#) ![Not relevant](#)

**Misreading your baby as unhappy can lead to over stimulation making them over tired and hard to settle.**

![Highly relevant](#) ![Not relevant](#)

**Your baby always seems unsettled, resulting in few happy play moments, and settling them is difficult.**

![Highly relevant](#) ![Not relevant](#)

Understanding what is contributing to your baby being unsettled will help you to re-focus on and look at what you could change.
Support

Sometimes there are other reasons such as your own childhood experiences, which make it difficult to be with your baby and help them deal with their feelings when they are unsettled.

Who were the significant people in your life when you were a child? Add others if you need.

Who helped you the most with managing your feelings?

What did that person do to help you with your feelings?

If you feel that there is something from your past that might be impacting on your parenting, talk to your health worker who can identify ways to support you.
Keeping calm

Tick strategies you use to help you keep calm when settling your baby?

- [ ] purposeful breathing
- [ ] stretching/ massaging self
- [ ] sharing the task with others
- [ ] saying positive things to yourself
- [ ] rocking/ hugging self
- [ ] changing surroundings
- [ ] taking a break
- [ ] ringing a friend
- [ ] playing soothing music
- [ ] others

Are there some things on this list that you haven’t tried before? Discuss with your health worker how you can build these into your day.

Before having children many parents feel a sense of order and control in their lives. The arrival of a baby can throw everyday life into chaos.

Mark on the below line how much order you like in your life.

I like a lot of order

I can cope with a lot of chaos

If you have marked ‘liking a lot of order’ consider what you may be able to do to regain some of that order now that you have a new baby. You may need to ask for help from your key support people.
It can also be useful to reflect on your baby’s temperament and your own.

Circle the words that best reflect:

Your baby’s temperament

Your own temperament

Reflect on whether there is a match or mismatch in your baby’s and your temperament.
Sleep and your household

It is important to recognise that a lack of sleep affects the whole household. It can make addressing your baby’s sleep needs even more difficult.

What do you notice when you and others in your home are feeling exhausted and over tired?

Parents might have an opportunity to sleep, but can find it hard to fall asleep or stay asleep.

How do you find falling asleep and staying asleep at the moment?

If falling asleep or staying asleep is difficult for you, talk to your health worker about some ways to manage this.
Looking after yourself

It is very important as a new parent to take the time to recharge your batteries and make time out for yourself.

Can you think of examples of what you do to look after yourself right now?

The diagram below shows the seven daily essential activities to boost brain function and create well-being. You might like to try some or all of these activities to help look after your physical and mental well-being.

Try to build some of these above activities into your day, even for just a few minutes. It may not be possible or realistic to do them all in one day. Try fitting in some of these activities over a longer period of time, for example during one week.
Keeping positive

When your baby is unsettled your understanding of what they need or want can become blurred.

Doing an activity with your baby that you both enjoy can help you keep a positive connection during challenging times.

List some activities you enjoy doing with your baby eg. going for a walk:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

If you are feeling exhausted or flat you may need someone else who can spend some time with your baby.

Who might be able to do this to support you and your baby?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Sometimes your baby can remind you of someone else in your life. This may make it hard for you to parent your baby or develop a feeling about who your baby is.

There may even be moments when you think your baby is trying to manipulate you. If this is happening to you talk to your health worker.

Think about your baby when he or she is unsettled and write your thoughts here.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
It can be difficult being a parent on your own, particularly if your baby is unsettled and has difficulty sleeping.

**Who are your key support people?**

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

**Do you find it difficult or easy to ask for help?**

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

**Who could you approach in the next week to ask for support?**

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

**What support could you ask for that would help you?**

*eg preparing meals, helping with cleaning or minding your baby.*

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________
Strengths

If your baby is having difficulty learning to sleep it can put an additional strain on relationships. It is important that your relationship with your partner or significant other is a priority at this important time in your lives.

List your strengths and your partner’s (significant others) strengths as a reminder to you about what you both bring to your relationship and as parents.

Note: If you are a single parent and you have someone that you go to for support they can be included as your significant other.

Your strengths

Your partner’s strengths (or significant other)

Taking time to reflect as a parent shows your commitment to yourself and your baby. It is important to remember the good moments, particularly with sleep and settling.
Choose one of the following examples to share a time when:

You were able to respond to your baby’s distress


You persisted with a settling activity


We hope that this workbook was useful and helped you identify ways to help you settle and get your baby to sleep.

To ensure you and your baby get the support you need in the journey together, we encourage you to share your reflections in this book with your health worker.
More information

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