

MODULE 4: Discussion Points on Baby Comfort

Parents often have concerns about safe sleep recommendations, because they worry that a baby will not be comfortable if they follow them. Some of this comes from assuming that babies experience things the same way as adults or have the same expectations about how they like to sleep as adults. Actually, babies are quite adaptable, and it is important for families to have that information.

Firm surface/no pillows seem uncomfortable.

Sometimes families and other caregivers are concerned about having the baby sleep only on a firm surface with no padding and no pillows. They feel that putting a pillow or sheepskin or something else soft under the baby will be more comfortable.

Discussion Points:

- What we think of as comfortable may not seem that way to a baby. For most of human history and in many parts of the world, people and their babies did not sleep on soft, cushioned beds. Babies are actually fine on a firm surface. Keeping them safe from having their faces sink into a soft surface and not being able to breathe is important. The same is true of pillows.
- Babies have no experience sleeping on soft surfaces and don't expect them. They are happy sleeping in many settings. Think about all the places that babies fall asleep that you wouldn't find comfortable.

"No blankets" makes no sense.

Families worry that the baby will be too cold without blankets. Sometimes it is a belief (may be culturally related) that babies need to be kept very warm or need to sweat. Newly immigrated families coming from warm climates may be concerned about how colder temperatures affect babies. In areas where it is extremely cold in the winter and where indoor heating is not adequate, the reality of keeping a baby warm is a challenge.

Discussion Points:

- Unless a baby was born prematurely, babies experience the temperature much like adults. If an adult is comfortable with the room temperature, the baby is probably comfortable. Being overheated is a risk factor for SIDS.
- Blankets present a risk because they can cover the baby's face and affect breathing. Dressing a baby in layers or using sleep sacks/blanket sleepers can address the problem when homes are very cold.

- If other relatives are concerned about keeping the baby very warm, part of the family’s plan can include sharing the idea that babies do not need to be warmer, and in fact, being overheated is a risk for SIDS. Keeping blankets off baby’s face and keeping her from overheating are part of good baby care.
- For families who have lived in hot climates, this recommendation may be particularly confusing. It is important to share the idea that blankets and other clothing designed to keep babies warm in the U.S. are made to hold in body heat and the baby cannot kick off blankets or take off clothing as an adult might do when overheated. In addition, young babies’ bodies are not yet efficient in regulating body temperature, and this can affect how their heart and other body systems function. Without this context, concerns about overheating may not make sense to families who come from hot climates.
- For families who have beliefs about hot and cold in relation to health, it is important to understand those beliefs. Information about how blankets can cover the baby’s face may make more sense to them.

This handout has been developed as a component of the Building on Campaigns with Conversations: An Individualized Approach to Helping Families Embrace Safe Sleep & Breastfeeding online curriculum. To view the entire curriculum, please visit: <https://www.ncemch.org/learning/building>.

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