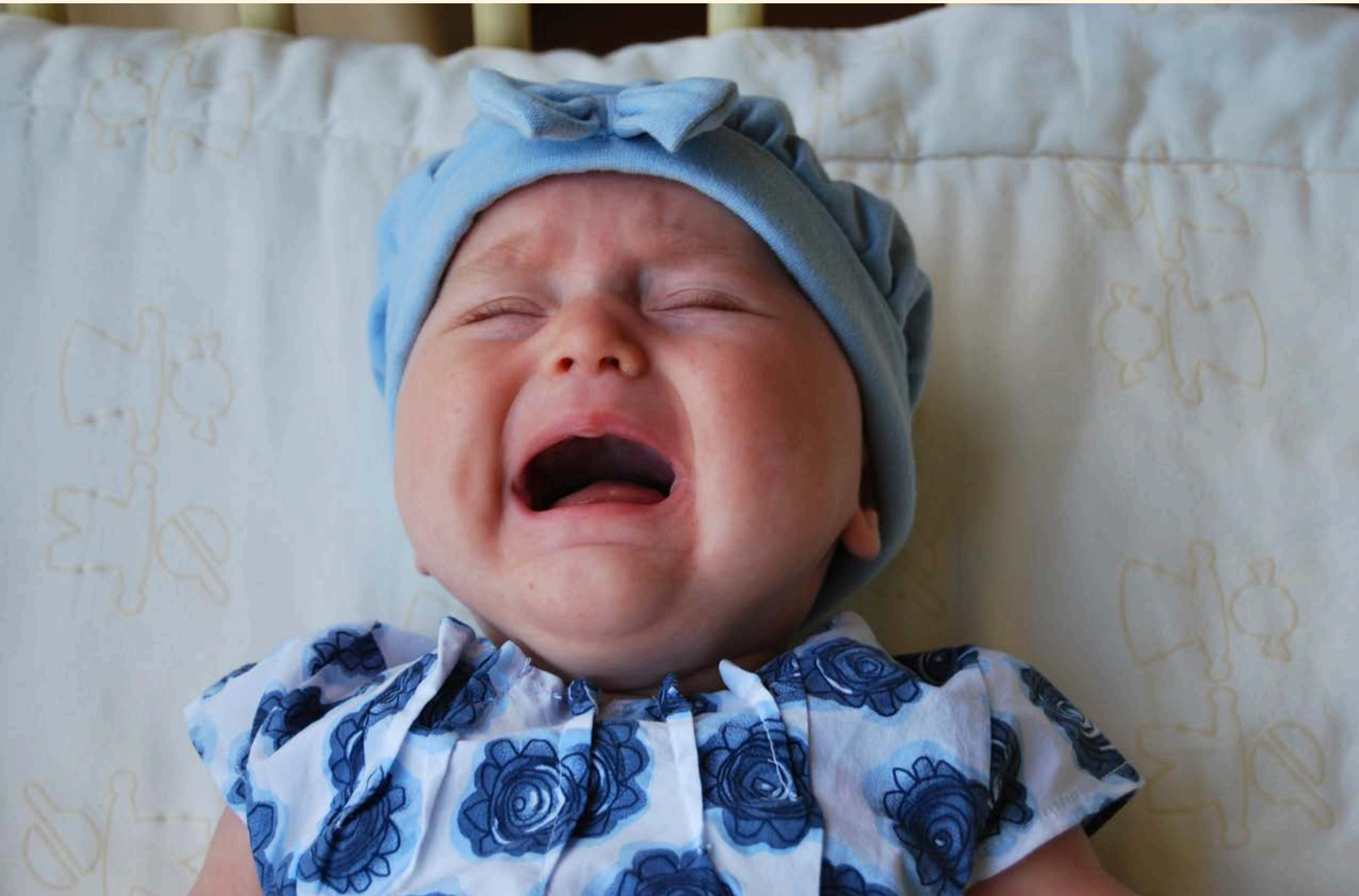


We Skoolhouse

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# **Sleep Training** **(And Why Never to Do It)**





## What is Sleep Training?

Sleep training is the practice of teaching a baby to fall asleep independently, often by encouraging longer, uninterrupted sleep through specific methods that usually involve some degree of self-soothing. Although these approaches are promoted as tools to help parents get more rest, research has shown potential developmental drawbacks, as these methods can conflict with infants' natural needs for comfort and regulation through close contact with caregivers.

### 6 Common Sleep Training Techniques:

#### 1. Cry It Out (CIO)

**Method:** The "cry it out" approach involves placing the baby in their crib and allowing them to cry until they fall asleep, without intervention or soothing from the parent. This method assumes that babies will learn to self-soothe and eventually fall asleep on their own.

**Concerns:** CIO is widely criticized for being potentially stressful for infants. Prolonged crying without comfort can increase cortisol levels, which affects a baby's brain development and may lead to attachment and emotional issues later in life. Studies suggest that CIO can interfere with an infant's ability to form secure attachment bonds, as they may interpret a lack of response from caregivers as a lack of support.

#### 2. Ferber Method (Graduated Extinction)

**Method:** Developed by Dr. Richard Ferber, this method involves letting the baby cry for gradually increasing intervals before the parent returns to offer brief reassurance, without picking the baby up. The intervals typically lengthen over several nights until the baby learns to sleep without parental intervention.

**Concerns:** Although this approach is less abrupt than CIO, it can still be distressing for infants. Repeatedly leaving and returning may create confusion and anxiety for the child, as they sense their caregiver's presence but are not receiving the comfort they need to feel secure.

### 3. Chair Method

**Method:** In the chair method, a parent sits in a chair near the baby's crib as they fall asleep, offering a physical presence but minimal intervention. Each night, the parent gradually moves the chair farther from the crib until they are no longer in the room when the baby falls asleep.

**Concerns:** While gentler than CIO or Ferber, this approach may still be emotionally challenging for babies, who are highly sensitive to the presence or absence of their caregiver. The incremental distancing can be confusing and may lead to anxiety about being left alone.

### 4. Pick Up, Put Down (PUPD)

**Method:** The PUPD method involves picking up the baby when they cry, comforting them until they are calm, and then putting them back in the crib while they are still awake. The cycle repeats until the baby falls asleep.

**Concerns:** Though often seen as a more responsive method, the repeated picking up and putting down can be overstimulating for some babies, potentially making it harder for them to settle. Additionally, it doesn't fully address an infant's need for consistent closeness and may still lead to distress.

### 5. Bedtime Fading

**Method:** Bedtime fading involves gradually adjusting the baby's bedtime by 10-15 minutes each night, based on the time they naturally fall asleep. The idea is to shift the bedtime gradually to align with the baby's natural sleep patterns without forcing a fixed sleep schedule.

**Concerns:** Although this approach is less forceful, it still operates under the premise of training a baby to sleep on a schedule, which may not align with their natural rhythms. Babies have varied needs, and bedtime fading may not allow them to communicate when they truly need sleep or closeness.

### 6. The Sleep Lady Shuffle (Gentle Sleep Training)

**Method:** The Sleep Lady Shuffle involves a gradual retreat method similar to the chair method, where parents provide presence and reassurance but avoid picking up the baby. Over time, parents move further away until the baby learns to sleep alone.

**Concerns:** This method is marketed as gentle, but the gradual withdrawal can still be distressing for babies, as they perceive the reduction in contact. It may not fulfill their need for close, reassuring interactions before sleep, which can be crucial for emotional regulation.



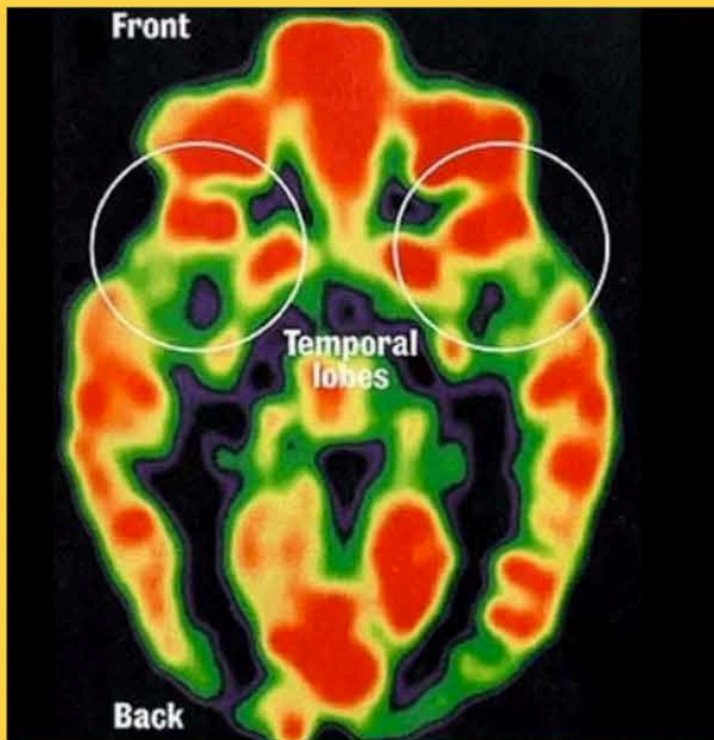
From a biological and evolutionary perspective, responding to our babies' cries rather than leaving them to "cry it out" aligns with how humans have adapted for optimal survival, health, and brain development. Here's why:

### **1. Evolutionary Need for Close Contact and Responsiveness**

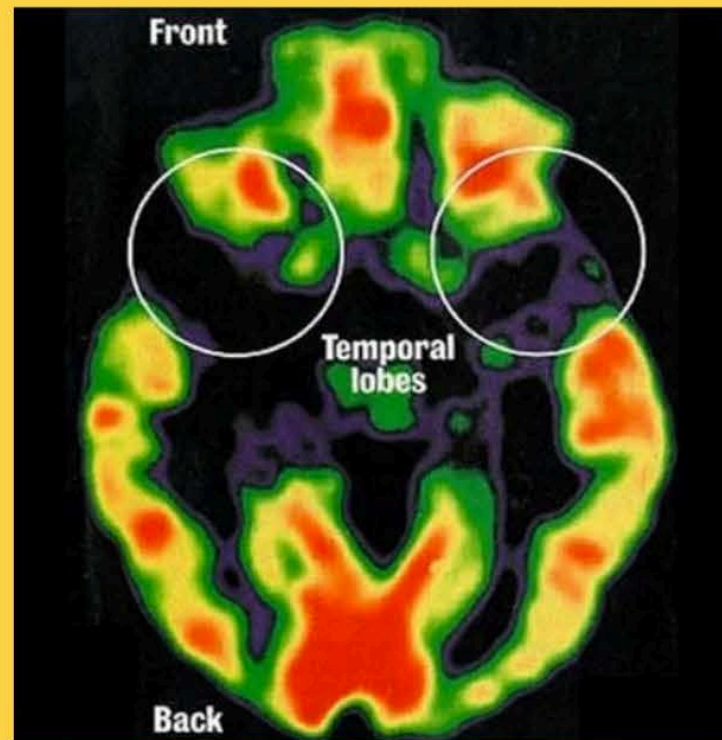
- **Survival Instincts:** For thousands of years, human infants depended on caregivers staying close for survival. In early environments, a crying baby left alone was vulnerable to predators, so responsive caregiving was essential. This biological design means that infants are hardwired to expect close, responsive care.
- **Attachment and Safety:** Babies naturally crave closeness as a signal of safety. Responding to their cries forms the basis of secure attachment, which is crucial for their emotional and social development. Attachment bonds developed in infancy directly impact their relationships and sense of security throughout life.

## 2. Infant Brain Development and Stress Response

- **Stress Hormones:** When babies are left to cry without comfort, their bodies release high levels of cortisol, a stress hormone. Persistent high cortisol during infancy can affect brain development, particularly in areas responsible for emotional regulation, memory, and stress response. This can lead to a heightened stress response later in life, making them more prone to anxiety and stress disorders.
- **Formation of Neural Pathways:** Early experiences, especially responsive caregiving, shape brain architecture. When caregivers respond consistently, the infant's brain builds strong pathways for trust, security, and emotional regulation. Ignoring cries, as in sleep training, can interfere with these pathways, making it harder for the child to manage emotions and trust relationships in the future.



**Child's Healthy, Typically  
Developing Brain**



**Child's Brain Exposed to  
Trauma & Neglect**

Source: Dr. H.T. Chugani. Newsweek, Spring Summer 1997

**From the Evergreen Psychotherapy Center:** "The limbic system is the social & emotional part of the brain, governing attachment, nurturing instincts, learning, implicit memory (preverbal, unconscious), motivation, stress response, and the immune system. The circuits of the limbic brain are wired together almost entirely by attachment experiences, and are altered by stress and trauma. In other words, the neurons of the limbic regions are genetically programmed to connect with one another via early child-caregiver interactions."

### 3. The Role of Co-Regulation in Healthy Development

- **Building Emotional Regulation:** Babies do not have the capacity to regulate their own emotions; they rely on caregivers to help them calm down (a process called "co-regulation"). When caregivers respond to distress, it teaches the infant's brain how to manage and reduce stress over time.
- **Self-Soothing Myths:** Unlike adults, infants aren't born with self-soothing abilities. Learning self-soothing skills comes from being soothed by others repeatedly over time. When parents respond and comfort babies, they teach the foundations of self-regulation. Sleep training methods that leave babies to cry do not build self-soothing; they only teach that comfort may not come when needed.



### 4. Long-Term Effects on Emotional and Social Health

- **Trust and Security:** Responsiveness in infancy helps build a foundation of trust, as babies learn that their needs will be met. This foundation is critical for building healthy, resilient relationships as they grow. Studies show that children who experience consistent responsiveness as infants are often more secure, empathetic, and confident.
- **Attachment and Independence:** Contrary to the belief that constant responsiveness makes babies overly dependent, studies reveal that babies with secure attachments actually become more independent over time. They feel safe to explore and take risks because they know they have a secure base to return to.

## 5. Sleep and Biological Rhythms

- **Infant Sleep Patterns:** Babies' sleep cycles are vastly different from adults' due to their need for feeding, warmth, and closeness. Sleep training often ignores the biological necessity for infants to wake during the night for nourishment and connection, potentially forcing them into unnatural sleep patterns that don't align with their developmental needs.
- **Responsive Night Care:** Frequent nighttime wakings have evolutionary roots and support both nutritional needs and bonding time. When caregivers respond, it reinforces the baby's sense of security and helps align their sleep patterns with their natural developmental rhythm.



# Debunking Common Misconceptions & Perspectives

## Misconception #1

- **Adult Perception:** Leaving babies to cry teaches them to self-soothe and be independent.
- **Baby's Reality:** Babies cannot understand the concept of self-soothing; they interpret parental absence as a lack of safety, which causes significant stress to their developing brains. Sure, they may eventually stop crying, but that's often due to learned helplessness and desensitization—coping mechanisms that can resurface in adulthood as attachment and self-regulation issues.



## Misconception #2

- **Adult Perception:** My baby's needs are met so I can let them cry.
- **Baby's Reality:** Meeting physical needs is not enough; emotional security and comfort are crucial for healthy development. Ignoring a baby's cries can lead to feelings of abandonment and insecurity.

## Misconception #3

- **Adult Perception:** All babies can be trained to sleep better with the right techniques. Plus it's very short intervals, so it's fine.
- **Baby's Reality:** Your baby has zero concept of time or your plan. Their limited attention span means that every minute feels like an hour when they are in survival mode, filled with evolving fear that no one is coming. The instinct for attachment and connection cannot be overridden by any forms of sleep training

## Misconception #4

- **Adult Perception:** My pediatrician recommended sleep training as the best method for my baby.
- **Baby's Reality:** Pediatric advice often overlooks the emotional, developmental, and biological needs of infants, which prioritize attachment and responsive care over strict sleep schedules.



## Misconception #5

- **Adult Perception:** Sleep training is a necessary approach for busy parents to get adequate sleep and manage work demands.
- **Baby's Reality:** The emotional trauma from prolonged crying can leave an imprint on a baby's nervous system, impacting their development and future relationships. Modern day expectations and demands may have changed, but your baby's biological and evolutionary needs have not. They are literally in survival mode and need you to respond in order to feel safe and secure.



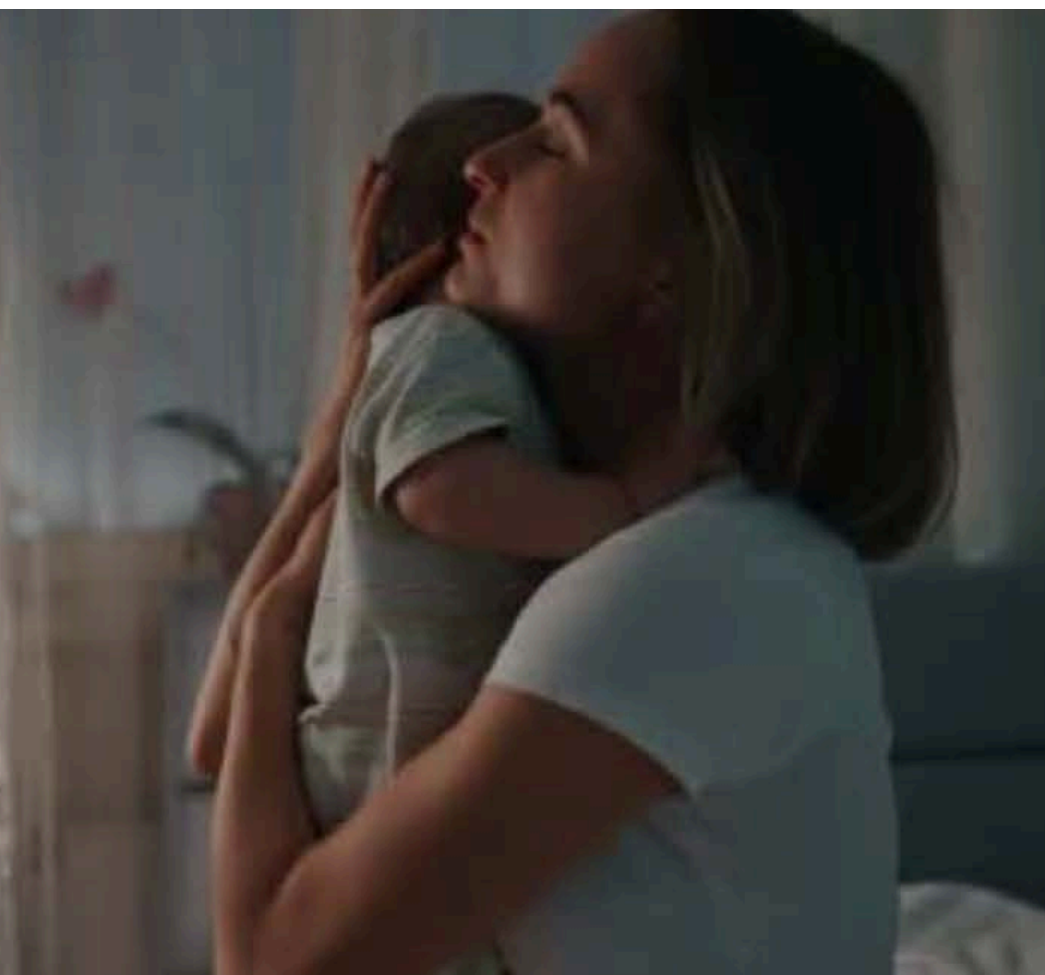
## Misconception #6

- **Adult Perception:** We stay close and reassure with loving words.
- **Baby's Reality:** Your baby has no idea what your words mean, nor do they provide the comfort they need. They are not in a cognitive state to decode language and calm down. Adults even struggle with emotional regulation and rationalization during stressful experiences, yet we think babies are equipped to handle this?

# So What Should I Do?



When  
Your  
Baby  
Begins  
to Cry...



...You Pick  
Up and  
Comfort  
Your Baby.  
**Every Time.**



**MADE FOR CHILDREN. DESIGNED FOR YOU.**

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