

# Safe sleep and rest in child care

by Julie Peters

Your child will have their own individualised rest and sleep routine at home, however, when you start using child care, you may find that this routine is different to the practices used in the service. This is because services and educators must comply with the SIDS and Kids safe sleeping recommendations for children aged from birth to two years, and your child's home routine may not be entirely consistent with these. Where there are differences between what you do at home and what the service does, the educators should work positively with you to develop a routine for use at the service that is acceptable to both of you. The educators at your service should also provide you with information and support to help you to adapt your child's home routine to ensure that you are using safe sleeping practices.

## Safe sleeping for babies

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is the sudden and unexpected death of a baby from unknown causes. In Australia, SIDS accounts for the deaths of more babies between the ages of one month and one year than any other known cause. It is still not clear what causes SIDS, however being aware of and implementing safe sleeping practices will reduce the risk of SIDS.

NCAC recognises SIDS and Kids as the expert authority on safe sleeping practices for children aged 0 – 2 years. The following information is taken from the SIDS and Kids Infant Safe Sleeping Program, which is based on scientific evidence. More information about SIDS and Kids safe sleeping practices can be found on their website ([www.sidsandkids.org](http://www.sidsandkids.org)).

All child care services should be following these guidelines:

- Sleeping babies on their back, not on their tummies or side. Placing babies on their backs means they have better airway protection and are less likely to choke on vomit than babies sleeping on their tummies
- Ensuring babies' faces are not covered with anything such as doonas, pillows, soft toys or lamb's wool
- Never exposing babies to cigarette smoke
- Providing a safe sleeping environment which includes safe cots, mattresses and bedding
- Never sleeping babies on pillows, beanbags or couches
- Ensuring that cots and mattresses meet the relevant Australian Standards.

(adapted from Ford, 2010, p.5)

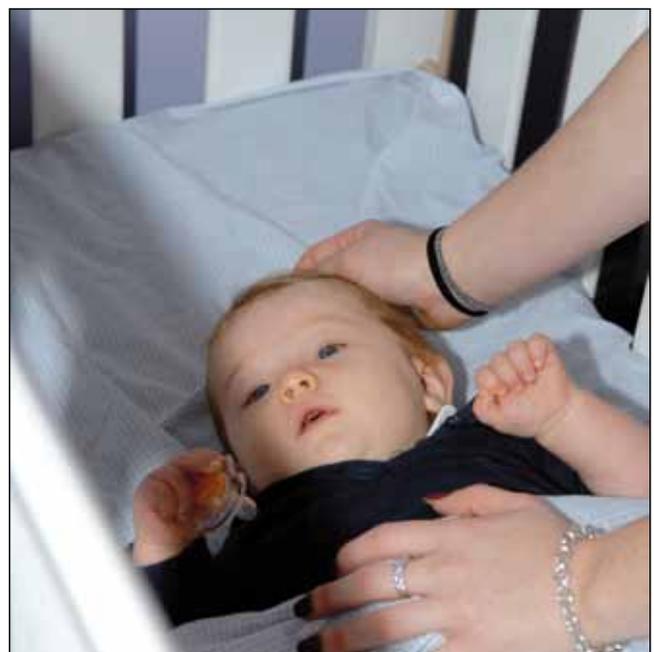
If your service cannot implement your child's sleep routine because it is not compatible with SIDS and Kids safe sleeping recommendations, the educators at the service should be able to tell you

why and discuss the relevant alternatives. They should work sensitively and helpfully with you at all times to ensure the best outcomes for your child.

## Safe sleeping for toddlers and older children

Although the evidence suggests that the risk of SIDS occurs in the first two years of a child's life, NCAC encourages educators to maintain these practices for children of all ages.

Your child should always have a safe place to sleep, regardless of their age, and the environment must be cigarette smoke free. Your service's safe sleeping practices for toddlers may include that toddlers are placed on their back to rest and are then allowed to roll over and find their sleeping position; likewise your service's policy may state that no child will have their face covered by bed linen during rest and sleep time. NCAC has developed a Rest and Sleep Policy Template, available on our website ([www.ncac.gov.au](http://www.ncac.gov.au)), to help services develop their policy.



## Talk with your child care service

During enrolment and orientation the educators should ask you about your child's rest and sleep routine, and the practices you use at home to settle your child to sleep. For example, does your child have a favourite story or lullaby which helps them settle, or a particular rocking technique? It is important to remember that if your child is aged under two, SIDS and Kids recommendations do not allow for soft toys in cots. Therefore, while a soft toy may be used to settle your child for rest, the service should not allow your child to sleep with the toy. Your service should also offer you information on safe sleeping practices, and advice on who to contact if you have any further questions.

Regular and open communication with the service will also ensure routines are consistent and meet your child's needs. All children have different routines and you will need to be proactive in letting the educators know what your child's routine is and letting them know of changes to this. Your child's sleeping patterns may be different in care to at home. This is often because in most child care settings there will be several children sleeping in the same area as opposed to home where your child may have their own room.

## Other sleep time practices

Controlled comforting (sometimes called 'controlled crying' or 'sleep training') is a technique used to help children learn how to settle themselves to sleep, rather than adults feeding, patting or cuddling them to sleep. While many families use controlled comforting at home, educators will be unable to do this at care as it is likely to be disruptive to other children in care.

If your child becomes very tired the educators will allow them to rest, even if this is outside their

normal sleep routine. Families sometimes find it difficult if their child sleeps at a time when they normally don't as this can upset their sleep routine during the evening. However, educators must ensure your child's wellbeing at care, and they will not prevent your child from sleeping when they are clearly tired and want to go to sleep. Again, you and your child's educators will need to work together to find a solution that best meets your child's needs.

Conversely, most services will have a time during the day designated as 'rest time'. During this time it is not appropriate for the educators to make children lie down to 'rest' for extended periods – if they do not need to or wish to do so. While children may be asked to have a short rest or period of inactivity, educators should then offer children alternative quiet activities if they do not want to rest. The educators at your child's service should always have your child's safety and best interest as their first priority, and children should not be forced to lie down and rest so that educators can have a break or use the time for administration tasks.

## Conclusion

Rest and sleep times are a key part of most children's daily routine, particularly for younger children and babies. Each child's routine will be different, and there are health and safety issues that your child care service will need to consider when they are working with you to adapt your child's routine for the child care setting. At all times, the main considerations should be your child's health, safety and wellbeing, and educators should work collaboratively with you to ensure the best outcomes for your child ■

### References and further reading

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**For more information on Child Care Quality Assurance please contact a NCAC Child Care Adviser.**

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