

# Safer Sleeping

A Guide For Practitioners



This guide has been developed to help you identify where babies are most at risk of Sudden Unexpected Death In Infancy (SUDI) and provides advice on the steps that can be taken to prevent this.

To prevent further deaths, **everyone** working with families needs to promote safer sleeping advice.

All professionals who come into contact with families with infants up to 15 months should assess the sleep environment and use the following resources as a basis for discussion to reinforce safer sleeping messages.

## REMEMBER, EVERY SLEEP NEEDS TO BE A SAFE SLEEP

- A change of routine such as an accommodation move, the baby being unwell or parents being more tired than usual leads to decisions being taken that they wouldn't usually take, such as co-sleeping with inadequate preparation.
- A National Thematic Review of Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy found most deaths were preventable and a result of parents co-sleeping in unsafe environments and often after consuming alcohol or drugs. The findings can be found in our [One Minute Guide](#), or on Coventry's [Podcast](#).



## PROFESSIONALS SHOULD:

- Use hard-hitting clear messages and help parents to understand why there is a risk.
- Have "What if..." conversations and explain the consequence of actions, such as how co-sleeping on a sofa can lead to accidental suffocation and ultimately a child's death.
- Deliver messages repeatedly and to the wider family network, including Dads, Grandparents, family members and friends. Families are more likely to listen to someone they trust, and these groups could be giving outdated or unsafe advice.
- Remember that sleeping arrangements may have a cultural influence or be the norm in certain cultures. Be mindful, culturally sensitive and tailor the advice to ensure if co-sleeping does occur, it is in the proper manner.
- Look at Sudden Unexpected Deaths in Infancy in the context of the families lived experience including any possible neglect, domestic abuse, mental ill health and substance misuse
- Not lower thresholds or make assumptions based on deprived backgrounds or similar family circumstances that you have encountered.

# CHILDREN AT RISK OF SUDDEN UNEXPECTED DEATH IN INFANCY

The checklist below provides you with a number of potential risk factors that increase the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Use these to identify who may be at risk of unsafe sleeping so that you can ensure that parents and carers are aware and follow the safe sleeping advice. It is not about how many risks are present; these are all risk factors in their own right.

## CHILD

- Low birth weight (<2.5kg)
- Mild symptoms - 'snuffly', cold
- Under 1-year old prematurity (<37 weeks)



## PARENTING CAPACITY

- Smoking in pregnancy
- Substance use
- Young mother (under 20 years)
- Alcohol use
- Mental ill-health
- Neglect

## FAMILY AND ENVIRONMENT

- Smoking in household
- Co-sleeping
- Domestic violence
- Unsafe sleep environment including position, sofa, cluttered cot, excess covers etc.
- Neglect



Warwickshire  
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## WHAT TO DO NEXT:



If you identify any of the risk factors, follow these steps:

- Check whether the family know what the safe sleep advice is: check their understanding of the advice and why it's so important to follow it.
- Are they following the safe sleep advice? Ask where the baby woke up. Remember, **every sleep needs to be a safe sleep** – whether baby is sleeping at night or during the day, at home or away from home.
- Ensure that the safer sleep for babies' information from the Lullaby Trust is given out in the parent's first language. Easy Read reference cards in 24 languages can be found [here](#).
- Explore what might be preventing the family from following the advice. This could be a range of things. Where you can, put in place support and follow up as much as your professional role allows.
- Consider referring to another service for support, this may be with smoking, mental health, domestic violence. Try and explore why they haven't engaged before and follow up any referral you make.
- Remember, families can always access advice and support from universal health services as required.
- If you have concerns, liaise with other professionals working with the family.
- Consider the need for an Early Help Assessment Form or use of the GCP2 and a Clutter Image Rating Scale

The Lullaby Trust website has lots of information about safe sleeping for both professionals and parents, and any professional can print the safe sleep resources:

- [Professionals Guide](#)
- [Parents Guide](#)
- [Bedsharing Quick Reference Card](#)
- [Easy Read Card](#)
- [Young Parents Hub](#)
- [Speech Free Animations](#)

## RESOURCES:



The Lullaby Trust have also created a free to download [Baby Check App](#), available on Apple and Google Play, featuring 19 simple checks that lets parents know whether their baby needs to see a doctor or health professional.

Birmingham Safeguarding Childrens Partnership have produced a [series of videos](#) as part of their 'Who's in Charge?' campaign, highlighting the dangers of drinking alcohol and sleeping with your baby.