

One Minute Guide to Safe Sleep in the Early Years

This quick-reference guide supports early years practitioners and childminders in following safe sleep practices, aligned with EYFS 2026, NHS safer sleep guidance, and The Lullaby Trust recommendations.

Ensuring that every child is physically safe and emotionally secure during sleep and rest is a critical element of safeguarding. Safe sleep practices, play a pivotal role in preventing accidents, injuries, and more severe outcomes such as SIDS.

The EYFS 2026 statutory states: **“Babies and children must be placed down to sleep safely.”**

For children under 2 years old, the following requirements apply:

- Children must be placed down on their back in their own separate sleep space on a firm flat surface such as a cot, bed or mattress on the floor. Babies aged 12 months and under must only be placed to sleep in a cot.
- Sleep spaces must only contain firm, flat, waterproof mattress and lightweight bedding which is firmly tucked in around the child below their shoulders to prevent head covering. Alternatively, a well fitted baby sleep bag may be used. Check the manufacturer’s recommendations before using a baby sleep bag.
- Where blankets are used, the child must be placed feet-to-foot at the bottom of the cot, with blankets tucked in.
- Cots must not contain extra items such as toys, pillows, extra blankets, bumpers, wedges, or straps.
- Children should not get too hot or cold. The recommended room temperature for babies is 16 – 20°C.
- Children’s heads must not be covered.
- **Babies under six months of age must always have an adult with them in the same room for every sleep. All children must be frequently checked when sleeping.**
- **Children must always be within sight and hearing of staff when sleeping.**

Being safe includes ensuring that cots and bedding are in good condition and suited to the age of the child, and that babies are placed down to sleep safely in line with the latest government safety guidance.

Creating a Safe Sleep Culture

Leadership and management play a critical role in establishing and maintaining a safe sleep culture within early years settings. Effective leadership ensures that the importance of safe sleep is fully understood that staff are well-trained, and that policies are consistently followed.

Shared responsibility and team accountability

Within each early years setting every practitioner must take ownership of their role in ensuring a safe sleep environment. This means being proactive in following and promoting safe sleep guidelines and being vigilant in identifying and addressing potential risks. Ongoing discussions, between staff especially during handovers, are vital in ensuring that all children’s sleep needs and any specific requirements are consistently met. This continuous communication helps maintain a high standard of care. Encouraging staff to foster a supportive open culture within their teams will also enable staff feel comfortable raising concerns about sleep safety and to offer peer support to one another.

Developing Parent Partnerships for Safe Sleep Practices

Through developing positive relationships with parents, practitioners can gain valuable insights into children’s sleep needs, which will support settling in and ensure any changes or issues in sleep patterns are shared. Practitioner can also help promote safe sleep practices within the home through offering parents’ advice and guidance or through holding workshops on safe sleep.



Best practises to consider

- **Establish and implement clear, comprehensive sleep policies** based on the latest guidance from the NHS, Lullaby Trust, and EYFS.
- **Follow safe sleep guidelines:** Always place babies on their backs to sleep, and use a firm, flat mattress with a fitted sheet. Avoid soft bedding, pillows, and toys in the sleep area.
- **Provide child centred tailored care** for each child and seek specialist advice for children with SEND who may require additional support or reasonable adjustments.
- **Provide an appropriate safe sleep environment:** Ensure the sleep area is free from hazards. Keep the room at a comfortable temperature between 16–20°C and avoid overheating. If possible, provide a separate sleep area for children to minimise disturbances and ensure a quiet, restful environment.
- **Conduct regular sleep checks:** This requires more than a regular visual check of a group of sleeping children. Practitioners must regularly check that each child is breathing, comfortable, safe from hazards and not too hot or cold.
- **Maintain the correct adult-to-child ratios** during nap times to ensure all children are adequately supervised.
- **Regularly carry out risk assessments** to identify any hazards in the sleep environment.
- **Provide staff training:** Ensure all staff are trained in safe sleep practices and understand the importance of following these guidelines consistently.
- **Foster an open culture** where staff feel comfortable raising concerns about sleep safety.
- **Maintain open communication with parents** about their child's sleep patterns and any concerns. Share safe sleep practices to ensure consistency between home and the early years setting.
- **Conduct regular audits** of the nursery's sleep areas and staff adherence to safe sleep practices to ensure compliance with safety standards.

Further information and useful links

- [NHS advice on sudden infant death syndrome:](#)
- [NHS advice on safe sleeping:](#)
- [Lullaby Trust - Safer sleep in early years settings](#)
- [Lullaby Trust Safe Sleep Professionals Guide](#)
- [Lullaby Trust Advice-for-early-years-poster](#)
- [Webinar Safer Sleeping Practices for Early Years Educators](#)

Remember The safety of babies' and young children sleeping is paramount

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