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### Should siblings share a room?

A reader who is expecting a new baby soon wrote recently to ask whether it was acceptable to have her newborn and 20-month-old toddler share a bedroom. Since there is no evidence-based literature on which to base a simple answer, the question is a challenging topic to tackle.

Sleep is a family ritual, and varies by culture and family lifestyle.

Many families choose to have young children sleep together for reassurance and companionship, or because one or both parents shared a room as a child and has fond memories. Some families believe that room sharing promotes bonding, with long-term beneficial effects on sibling relationships. Other parents worry that the presence of the infant will disturb a sibling's sleep, although the average toddler will probably sleep through a baby's nighttime crying. If space is available, some parents choose to put children in separate rooms to give them privacy and a little more independence.

Since most children are resilient and adapt quickly and successfully, sleeping arrangements should be a matter of family choice.

Where an infant will sleep must be planned and implemented carefully. If a room is to be shared, fine-tune the room to allow for any new furniture well in advance of the newborn's arrival. Make certain safety issues are considered to ensure that small objects, toys, and blankets can't get into the crib. Talk to the toddler about the positive aspects of the pending change, letting them know that many people share rooms, including Mom and Dad.

Thoughtful planning and trial and error may be needed to stabilize sleep rituals and nap times, but eventually consistent, thoughtful, creative parenting will succeed.

For the first few months of life, infants who are nursing are best off sleeping on their backs in a cradle or crib next to their parents' bed, regardless of their eventual sleeping space. This is most effective in establishing good breast-feeding habits, and parents get used to the baby's unique sounds. This arrangement also allows the family to gradually and comfortably integrate the 'newcomer.'

Unfortunately, many moms and dads lack confidence in their parental skills and decision-making abilities. Insecurity leads to ambivalence, stress, and guilt when they can't immediately meet the expectations and goals they have set for themselves and their growing families. Newborn sleeping arrangements should not become a stressful situation for a family. It is not necessary to buy a new home, move, or build an addition for that tiny new arrival.

This is one instance where, with proper planning for safety and comfort, there are no wrong solutions and decisions regarding children's sleeping arrangements should be a matter of family well-being and parental choice.

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