

The art of bedtime basics

Some babies seem to sleep through from day one, but bedtime can be a real challenge for some families. **Sarah Taylor** opens up about bringing in a sleep trainer to help her establish a good bedtime routine for her son, **Daniel**.

Two months before our son was born, my friends and family organised a wonderful baby shower for me. I knew it was going to be a day I would treasure, so I bought a special book and asked all the guests to write down their top mum-to-be tips for me to keep and read through in the future.

Two weeks before Daniel's due date, I snuggled up on the sofa with a cup of tea and started to read through the words of wisdom. I couldn't believe how similar the comments were; almost all of the messages were along the lines of, "Kevin and you are going to love being parents- BUT stock up on the sleep while you can!"

Although I had often been told about the not-so-wonderful world of sleep deprivation, I had never given it serious thought. I'd pulled a few all-nighters at university when I hadn't left myself enough time to complete an assignment, I'd been to parties that ended in the early hours of the morning, and I'd occasionally been so busy with work that I would be finishing my e-mails as the birds serenaded me with a 6.00 am sing-song. But if I'm brutally honest, I was completely and utterly unprepared for the sleepless nights that were around the corner.

The first few weeks of Daniel's life were magical; I loved being a mother and was extremely lucky that my husband, Kevin, had managed to book four weeks off work so we could spend time together as a family. The only issue was that Daniel appeared to have baby-insomnia! I was so thankful that Kevin did a lot of the night shifts, because I was still very sore from the surgery I'd undergone and was starting to get very tired.

It was only when Kevin returned to work that I was given a true crash course in living with sleep deprivation. My eyes would sting, clothes became a necessity rather than a stylish choice, and I realised why my dad always used to fall asleep on the sofa when I was little: when your day starts at 5.00 am, there's a long stretch ahead of you!

I was never an advocate of strict routines and believed that Daniel would settle into a good bedtime routine on his own. As long as he was sleeping through the night by his first birthday, I told myself, I wouldn't worry too much about it.



Daniel's first birthday came and went and he still wasn't sleeping through the night. I knew it was time to take some action. A local midwife advised me to try the controlled crying method, which involved leaving him in his cot and walking out of the room. This was something that I didn't feel comfortable with, so I tried a number of other solutions: I sang to him, I read him a story, I got in the spare bed in his room, I slept on the floor and held his hand, I rocked him in my arms, and I even thought about getting into the cot with him!

No matter what I tried, bedtime always seemed to be a challenge. I didn't like to see Daniel get upset, and he knew that if he stood up in his cot with his arms outstretched, I would always pick him up and cuddle him. This often ended with him climbing down and making his way back to his toys in the living room. Other times, I would let him fall asleep next to me (sometimes with a bottle in his mouth) and transfer him to his cot once he was sound asleep. When he then woke up alone, he'd become upset again and struggle to get back to sleep.

Both Kevin and I agreed we needed help to get Daniel into good bedtime habits, so we arranged for a consultation with a sleep expert. With over 12 years experience as a trained paediatric nurse, qualified nutritional therapist and nanny, Hannah's qualifications are really impressive, and I was really excited to meet her. She was adamant that, within a month, Daniel would be happier at bedtime and would start sleeping through the night.

Our consultation started with an hour-long phone call, during which we shared our problems and expectations with Hannah. She asked me lots of questions about Daniel, from his eating habits to his bedtime routine. It was great to know that the advice she was going to give us would be tailored to suit Daniel's needs. I wanted him to feel like his cot was his own little sanctuary and that he was comfortable and confident enough to sleep in his own room.



Hannah told me about the importance of a consistent routine and how we could help make Daniel feel happy and familiar with what bedtime meant. Hannah advised small changes to his day-to-day schedule, as well as how we managed bedtime. The new routine was to be centered around Daniel's likes and dislikes. He absolutely loves music, so we felt it would be important to introduce lullabies in the evenings, to help him feel safe and secure when it came to bedtime. Daniel's meal and sleep times, as well as our daytime routine, were also to be adjusted, to fit around our lifestyle.

Two hours after our conversation, Hannah had sent me a detailed page of notes from our conversation (this was very useful, as I had been so carried away asking her all the questions that came into my head that I'd forgotten to write anything down!).

Kevin and I met up with Hannah a week later, at our house. This meant she was able to meet Daniel as well, and all three of us felt like we had known her for ages. Kevin and I chatted away to her and Daniel excitedly showed her his new stacking cups.

We discussed in detail the personalised sleep plan Hannah had brought along with her, and she then adapted it to our wishes. Hannah explained that the process would be divided into stages, so that it wouldn't be too overwhelming for us or Daniel.

Hannah assured us that if we were to commit to her advice, we'd start to see results very soon.

We talked through the first stage of the sleep plan, and, with all of the changes we had made, we were ready to start that day! Although we were not allowed to comfort Daniel in the way we had before, we would be in the room with him whilst he fell asleep which reassured me. As Hannah walked out of the door, she said that she wanted a call by the time she got home, telling her that Daniel was asleep. Although he took a little while to settle at first, I had to call Hannah two hours later and ask her how long I should let him sleep for. It was a very funny conversation.

Hannah assured us that she would be on call 24 hours a day if we had any concerns or worries. Over the next few days, Hannah virtually became a family member and answered any number of calls from us - the longest I ever had to wait for a reply was five minutes, even during mealtimes or first thing in the morning. She would kindly reassure us, and her positive attitude made me feel great about the job we were doing as parents. She gave me an amazing amount of confidence and I will always be grateful for that.

Within four days, Daniel had started sleeping through the night! If he woke up, he just rolled over and went back to sleep. He started going to bed at 7 pm, which was unheard of, and he would get up at 7.30 am. It was perfect! Kevin and I felt refreshed, and Daniel looked happier because he was getting the right amount of sleep. Bedtime was no longer a challenge.

We are now at the stage where Daniel enjoys going to bed and it makes me smile when I think of how happy our little boy feels in his own room. He kisses us both goodnight and he even waves to us and says 'night night'. He loves his bedtime story, and instead of crying when he is put in the cot, he wiggles himself into a corner and knows it is sleep time. This means that Kevin and I can have dinner together, and we have even made our way through lots of the programmes we had recorded on Sky Planner. We really have come to think of Hannah as our very own Mary Poppins!

If you're struggling with something, no matter how big or small, remember to call on friends, family, or experts for support and advice. It really can make a difference!

Next issue Hannah Love gives us some handy tips on the basics of a good bedtime routine.

Further information

To contact Hannah Love please visit the Yummy Baby Group website at www.yummybabygroup.co.uk or call her on 07872 030 206