



Why Won't Little Ones Doze Alone?

Your child hasn't started snoring without you yet, but is it worth the worry? Here's why a bunch of kids still snooze with mum and dad.

All over the country parents wrestle with the idea of letting their little one spread their wings by moving them out of their room and into their own, left to wonder: is it too early? When's too late? Is it what's right for them and their child?

The age of the internet comes with a storm of different advice: social media can present often unrealistic or glorified depictions of parenting, and well-meaning carers can find themselves criticized for any choice they make. With discourse being vast and different opinions being even vaster, it's no surprise parents struggle to pinpoint what the 'correct' option is.

Reagan Grainger, mother and early years professional, started her son off in a cot for the first 9 months of his life, eventually transitioning him to a double mattress on the floor which she framed with a modified playpen to ensure his safety. She explains parents often panic because they don't know what move they should take next.

The decision of whether it's time to go straight from cot to a bed in their own room can be daunting, but as a professional she was able to make that choice.

“For us, the floor bed was going to be the best option. Just for us, he was a colicky baby so he screamed, and screamed, and screamed some more!” she explained. “It was the easiest option to be able to get in the bed with him and stay if you needed to if it was a bad night, or leave if you felt he was able to stay on his own.”



Image credit: Reagan Grainger.

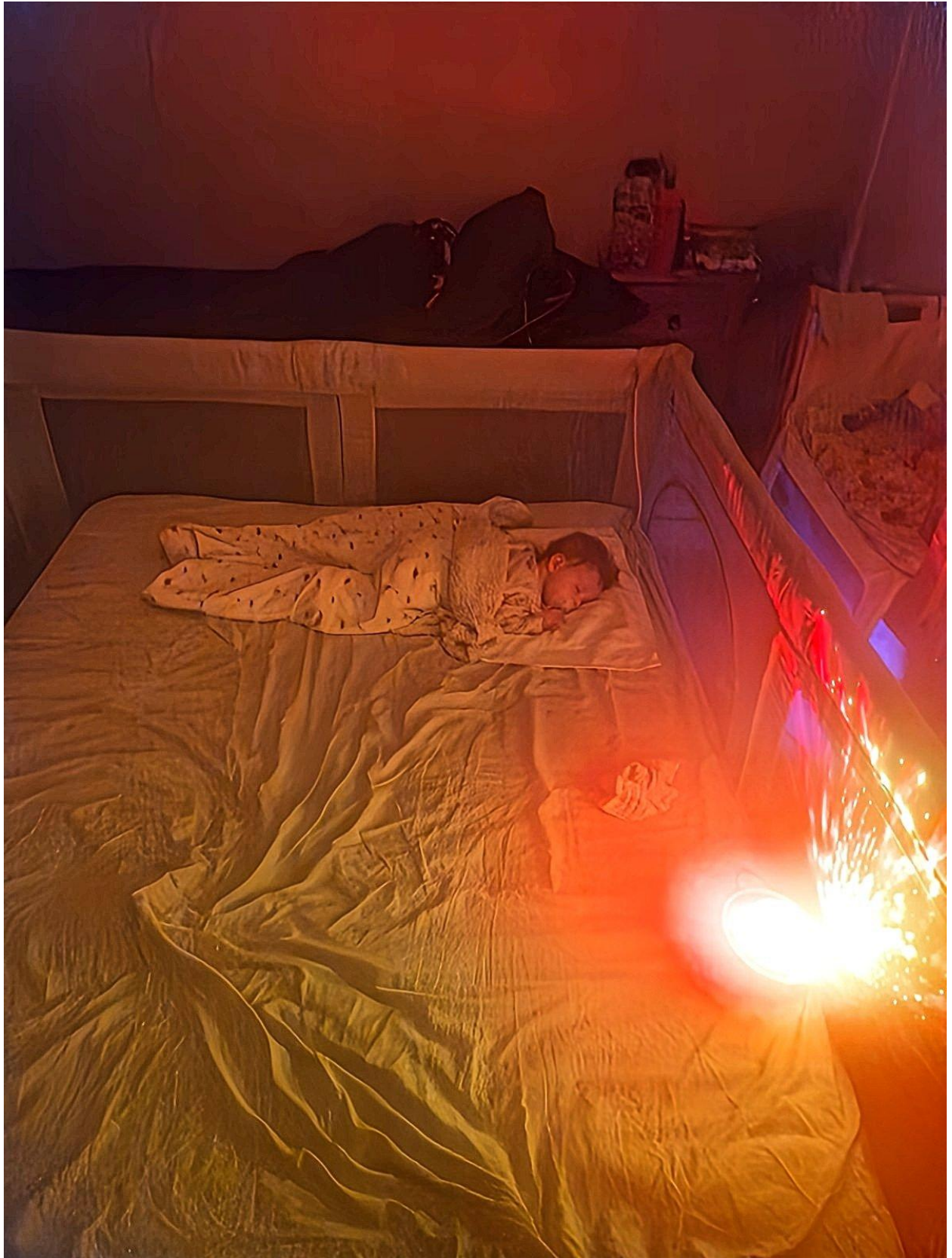


Image credit: Reagan Grainger.

One of the major benefits Reagan finds when co-sleeping with her now 18-month old is being able to soothe her son immediately, especially when he's going through something he needs comforting through.

"It's convenient and easy to be right next to him," she admitted. "I sleep better because I'm not coming in and out of the bedroom."

"It can be super frustrating. Postpartum anger is a big thing that people don't talk about where your hormones are so up and down that the slightest change in your routine, the slightest 'oh the baby's up' can genuinely make you want to smash plates."

Helen Ball, director of the Infancy and Sleep Centre and professor of anthropology at Durham University, agrees that co-sleeping helps parents closely deal with disruption during the night. However, she sheds light that a parent's anxiety can be the reason for co-sleeping just as much as the child's.

"Some parents that we have interviewed have explained that they sleep with their baby because they have anxiety about their safety and want to keep them close," she explained. "It's so if they stop breathing they can intervene for instance – or someone can bring them into bed at specific times, such as whether they've got a fever or a cold, and monitor them closely."

On the other hand, parents might rely on their child for companionship, such as when relationships break up and they want the comfort they had when someone slept next to them.

"There are times when parents can be overly anxious and they're not necessarily sleeping with their child because it's benefiting them," Ball explained.

Children who are especially young, such as infants, require more care. The NHS and Lullaby Trust educate that the safest sleeping arrangement for a baby is in their own cot. Ball says one of the most negative co-sleeping situations is sleeping with a younger infant on the sofa as 'it's easy to suffocate a baby' by accident. According to the Lullaby Trust, it also makes the risk of sudden infant death syndrome, the sudden, unexpected death of a baby, fifty times more likely.

"Parents have to be aware of not sleeping with their baby if they've been drinking or under the influence of something," she added. This is reinforced by the Lullaby Trust's guidance which says not to sleep with babies if you have recently drunk alcohol or taken drugs or medication that make you tired.

Financial status can play a huge part in co-sleeping: some parents genuinely can't afford to have their child sleep elsewhere, Ball explaining reasons for co-sleep can vary from 'very intentional, positive' choices to 'sort of reactive' choices where it's their only option.

"Some people in the UK that we've come across co-sleep with their baby because they didn't have anywhere else to put them. They either couldn't afford a crib or they were in such cramped

living conditions that there wasn't space to put another piece of furniture in the bedroom with them."



Patricia Everitt, a sleep practitioner from Cerebra, a charity that helps children with brain conditions, says co-sleeping may have a negative impact on social development in some situations.

"Some children who rely on their caregivers for emotional support haven't got it for moments such as sleepovers which means that they struggle to attend these things," she explained.

"They may want to, but feel they're unable to because of that anxiety. That might be more of an issue with some of the autistic children we work with because it's such a change for them as well."

While speaking about her plans to stay the night at her sister's house for her wedding, Reagan admitted it can harm travel and flexibility.

"It becomes doubly difficult for him because not only is he out of his normal environment, but he's also not offered the same level of comfort and support that he's got at home," she explained.

While many might believe that co-sleeping into later childhood might make your kid too attached, Ball explains otherwise, debunking it as a cultural myth in Western countries.

“It seems that if you let children leave the parent’s bed when they’re ready, then all of them will have left the parent’s bed by the time they’re eight or nine.” she said. “While they leave at different times, the ones that get to make that decision feel very securely attached to their family and then very confident.”

Reagan admits not one size fits all and, in the end, parents have that agency to choose what feels right.

“I know parents who have tried co-sleeping with their child and absolutely hated it, and it’s okay for them to say, ‘You know what, it doesn’t work for us,’” she explained. “Parents are vilified regardless of what they do, so you just have to be comfortable in the choice that you’ve made for your child and that it’s best for them and for you, really.”