SO you’re ready to sleep train your baby. That’s great! It’s going to be hard for a minute, it’s the truth, welcome to parenting ;) The thing is, there are some kids that are simply easier than others. When you think about those kids, what aspects do they have? They’re generally easy going, pretty good listeners, follow directions, etc. Well you may be wondering how this applies to sleep training, but it applies to EVERYTHING when it comes to parenting. Consistency, schedule, and routine will make your child happier and easier to manage. Now let’s say you’ve reached out to me – the first things I’m going to ask you are:

* How old is your baby?
* Do you have a routine?
* Do you have a nap schedule?
* Is baby EBF or do they take bottles?
* Who gets up with baby in the night?
* Do you have the ability to make a [tentative]schedule for your child?
* Does your baby use a pacifier? Blankie? What do they do to soothe themselves?
* Do you cosleep?
* Do you have pets?
* Does the baby have their own sleeping space?

Now ask yourself why I’m asking these questions and why they’re important. I could go on for days the background to these questions and why they’re important, but I’m not going to so try to think about it a little bit as you decide what you’re going to do next.

The answers from your previous questions have gotten me started on a ‘sleep training guide’ for your child. The wheels are turning in my head as I try to piece together the information you’ve given me, what I know, and see where things don’t ‘fit’ where they should.

Often times the first two bad habits we have to break – at the same time – are cosleeping and nursing/feeding to sleep. Before I even come over I’m going to tell you why these need to stop. Cosleeping is dangerous; it’s a fact. Now, am I saying that I’ve never coslept? Absolutely not. I’m not mom shaming. I’m adding a point to hopefully help push you to get that baby out of your bed. Another problem with cosleeping? You marriage/relationship IS going to suffer. It might not right now, right now it might have bonded you as a family and be the worlds most beautiful thing, but unfortunately that is not going to last. Eventually someone is going to want to just be alone with their partner, and that’s OKAY and that’s HEALTHY. Another thing that I’ve heard from EVERY. SINGLE. PARENT. That used to cosleep: I didn’t even realize how terribly I was sleeping until I started getting good sleep. BINGO!!!!!!! Not only is it healthy for you and your partner to have time alone, it’s healthy for you and your little one to have time apart too. Absence makes the heart grow fonder ;) Now when I say get the baby out of your bed does that mean that she’s never allowed to sleep with you again? Absolutely not! As a matter of fact, as soon as she is sleep trained she can nap with you, or climb into bed with you after a nightmare, whatever! And it’s not an issue because she knows her bed is where she sleeps. Another common thing I hear from previously cosleeping parents is that they used to LOVE cosleeping and couldn’t imagine sleeping without them, but now when they DO sleep with them it’s miserable! After having some restful sleep it becomes a lot more noticeable when that babe is kicking you all night long, breathing straight into your nose, sleeping on your hair, etc. Back to the feeding to sleep. I KNOW ITS EASIER. And I’m not even going to lie to you, some situations may still call for it – one/both parents are sick, single parent is sick, siblings are sick, HAVE to get some work done, BABY is sick, etc… but it should be used as an absolute last resort to the point that you literally have no other option. You need your baby to be able to go to sleep without being fed to sleep. I’m not going into pros and cons of pacifiers, but that’s often when these come in to play – a baby is comforted by suckling and that’s why they fall asleep while they’re eating. The pacifier gives the suckling to comfort without needing to wake someone to soothe them. But it can be hard to break. That’s all I’ll say about that.

So into sleep training; the exact suggestions I’m going to give you are based upon your specific baby. Your baby may or may not be any of the above mentioned things and the course of action may change based upon those factors. But generally the basics of sleep training remain the same.

* Get the baby out of your bed
* Stop feeding baby to sleep
* Your partner should be helping with night time feedings/changes etc (variable based upon age and necessity for feeding)
* If your baby is breastfed but also takes a bottle, it will be easiest to make your partner wake up for feedings while in the process of sleep training. Baby is not going to understand why the milk machine went from 24/7 availability to you never know what you’re gonna get.
* If your baby takes a pacifier implement that when it’s not a feeding time (again, breastfeeding moms if your baby is older than 6 months this will be easier to have your partner do)
* Most babies sleep better on their tummies HOWEVER it is absolutely NOT SAFE for them to be placed on their tummies until they are rolling over front to back, back to front, consistently while awake.
* If your baby is too little to sleep on their belly, a safe way to prop them on their side is to place two receiving blankets on either side of them (younger babies tuck a third receiving blanket under the two rolled blankets on either side of the baby (UNDERNEATH THE CHIN) creating a sort of burrito effect, older babies place the two receiving blankets rolled underneath the fitted sheet on the crib, make sure they are ALWAYS PLACED low enough below the shoulders that if they do happen to roll their faces don’t roll into the blankets)
* There are mixed reviews on this but I personally don’t think that the babies room should be pitch black. You want a baby that’s going to be able to sleep through anything, not just pure darkness. At night having the room completely black is fine, however a lot of babies actually are afraid of the dark once they’re a few months old, but during naps in particular I recommend allowing some light so they learn to sleep without complete darkness.
* Noise helps A LOT – you can get a noise machine, a fan, play music, etc. it tends to help A LOT and not having complete silence helps if anything goes bump in the night
* CRYING DOES NOT HURT YOUR BABY

I’m going to go ahead and explain that further right now before you all just quit reading. It is ok and honestly healthy for your baby to hear and learn their own voice. That being said, I would begin this process during the day during awake times to help avoid it being a traumatic experience the first couple of times – stepping away and leaving baby in pack n play to fuss for 5 minutes while you wash dishes, allowing yourself to walk away when you need a break, showering, etc. I’m not saying abandon baby alone, you can keep eyes on him the whole time or a monitor or whatever, just because he doesn’t know you’re right there doesn’t mean that you’re not. And you’re teaching him that you always come back. And him being nervous for 5 minutes somewhere in his own house where he’s completely safe, where you want him to feel completely safe, is absolutely not going to harm him. Cry it out is a whole different ball game and I’ll get into that further later. Anyways, if you start in small doses during awake time then move into naps. Put him in his bed, tell him you love him, and leave the room. The first time this happens may be screaming or may be totally fine, typically it’s the second time that’s the issue. You’ll put him in and possibly even before you’ve left the room he’s SCREAMING. Leave anyways. Go set the timer for 5 minutes and listen to his cry. That sounds sadistic, but hear me out. Depending on your babies age they may or may not be ready to be sleep trained. If they’re younger than 6 months they may honestly not be ready. That does NOT mean your three month old isn’t ready, but that’s where this part comes in to play. Listen to the cry. Is it sheer panic? Is he working himself up to the point he’s gagging? Or is he mad? If he’s ready to be sleep trained, more likely than not he’s mad. So listen to that. Is he manipulating you? Is that cry a cry saying he needs you? Is it really? Because I don’t know about you, but I don’t reward fits and tantrums. And that’s what’s happening here. So if he’s ok, leave him. If he’s just ANGRY, leave him. Listen for the cry to change and the second it becomes something else go ahead and run in there, but it’s probably not. Now after the five minutes if he’s still crying and he’s not calming down, you can walk in there and shhh him, and reassure him, lay him back down, pat his back for a minute, but don’t pick him up and don’t talk to him and DO NOT MAKE EYE CONTACT. He’s waiting for the eye contact – the moment he gets it he’ll probably smile. And God help you if you smile back. So it’s very important that you’re actually going into this paying attention and ready because he’s going to try to manipulate you. BE SMARTER THAN THE CHILD. Don’t stay in the bedroom for more than 2 minutes, walk out. If he’s not calming down that’s ok, walk out anyways. Again, listen for his cries. This is where if I was there I’d be able to play with the times a bit on how soon I think you should go in, but try to listen to the cry and decide for yourself. Try to listen for the anger, if it’s just PISSED OFF SCREAMING, continue to ignore him the best you can. If you have to sit outside his room and cry, that’s OKAY. It’s not forever mama, I promise, and he’s not hurt. His diaper is clean, he’s been fed, he’s probably exhausted, but you’re doing this for all of you. As we talked about schedules earlier, you can schedule events and things around nap times when your baby is sleep trained. Baby naps from 1-4? GREAT let’s have the family picnic at 11.. LOL.

I want to go over the most important points again

* Don’t talk. Don’t hold a conversation with your child or try to reason with them. It’s time to be quiet and take a nap, or it’s time for bed I love you, those are all more than enough. Talking to him is only going to wake him up more and he’s going to keep crying to get you to keep talking.
* Don’t make eye contact. That sounds cruel, but think about it. Think about back when your baby was an itty bitty and you HAD to nurse them to sleep or rock them or whatever, you know that they could have been eyes closed asleep, open them for one second, they catch your eye and they smile and it’s like starting from scratch. Don’t do it. The older they are, the smarter and more manipulative they are.
* Don’t feed to sleep. You’re not going to be giving them a bottle to bed forever, and your ped/dentist is going to tell you to pitch it by age 1 or 2 at the very latest. If your baby has teeth, the milk is sitting on their teeth all night long. And milk is high in sugar, whether it’s breastmilk or cows milk or formula it is TERRIBLE to be sitting on their teeth. If you haven’t started the habit, don’t. It’s not worth it. If you have started the habit, quit. Cold turkey. Honestly. It’s the easiest way I promise (although that varies in certain cases).
* Don’t lay with them to fall asleep. This is ok once in a while after they are sleep trained, some nights you just need extra cuddles or you have a nightmare or whatever, and that’s ok. And that’s exactly when it’s acceptable to cosleep. But only then.
* Don’t give in. YOU ARE THE PARENT. BE MORE STUBBORN THAN THAT CHILD.

Back to the crying

* The first time you leave, leave for 2-5 minutes (varies based on age)
* When you go back in don’t pick them up, shh them and pat them, tell them you love them, and leave
* This time is a lot more complicated because I’ve had cases as little as 2 minutes to as many as 40 because they’re honestly not really crying. So try for 10 minutes. Use your instinct and alter as needed.
* Back to the ‘not really crying’. Again, listen to the cry. This comes more into play during the second exit from the room – if they’re going totally quiet for like a minute or more and then out of nowhere this blood curdling scream, they’re playing you. They’re being quiet and building up their breath and their anger, or they’re falling asleep and screaming out to keep themselves awake hoping you’ll come in and rock them to sleep. So don’t leave baby suffering, but definitely listen to what they’re telling you with their cries.
* After the 10 (ish) minutes go ahead and go back in there if he’s not calm yet, try to lay him down and shh him and walk out. This is usually when I kind of decide for the night if he’s ok to keep going and he’s just really stubborn, or if it’s time to comfort him. EVEN IF IT’S TIME TO COMFORT HIM TO SLEEP the other rules do not go out the window, do not feed him to sleep, and try to avoid picking him up. Pat him to sleep if you can. And we’ll try again next wake up.
* Next wake up. Yep, baby doesn’t sleep through the night, that’s why you called me, there’s gonna be another wake up haha. If it’s a weekday, and you all have work tomorrow, try to let him fuss around for about 5 minutes because he might go back to sleep. If not, go ahead and go in there and pat him to sleep, sleep on the floor next to him, whatever. If it’s the weekend, do the same thing you did the first time. And be consistent about all of this, if it’s the weekend make sure you’re pushing him, if it’s a weeknight make sure that you’re pushing him a little so you’re not starting from scratch come weekend. The same goes for naps; try the same process for naps, usually nap schedules are easier to get, but once those are set night time is generally a lot smoother.

In regards to naps

* If someone is home with the baby for naps, try to have them stick to the same routine you’re using at night with the 5-10-5
* If they’re at daycare, find out if they have a nap time or what their policy is on naps and revamp a little from there

Nap schedules

Nap schedules vary a lot from baby to baby; for an easy reference I’ve posted a general amount of sleep per day each age should be getting

My suggested nap goal is 9-10 (ish) and 12/1-3/4 (ish) but that also varies. Younger kids need another nap or two in there and their naps may be more broken up.

Routines

It’s never too early to start a routine. Until your baby is 3-4 months old they won’t even begin to understand routine, but this will create a routine for yourself and therefore it’ll be easier to adapt into once you’re working on sleep training.

How long does it take?

That varies hugely; I’ve had babies sleep trained in one night, and others take months. But the thing is consistency, the more consistent you are, the faster it happens.

Important to remember

You as an adult and probably as a child wake up sometimes, and some nights you simply don’t sleep well. Even after sleep training your baby, these nights will happen. What you’re doing is molding his circadian rhythm so that he understands when he’s supposed to be awake and when he’s supposed to be sleeping, and knowing that it’s ok to wake up and that it’s ok if you’re not right there. The goal here is when he has those nights, you won’t know about it or it shouldn’t affect you much because he’s OKAY by himself. He’s ok babbling quietly at 2 am because he can’t sleep. What’s not ok is waking the whole house. That’s it.

There are some additional tips and tricks for sleep training, baby led weaning, potty training, etc on my website [www.sweetpeasleeptraining.com](http://www.sweetpeasleeptraining.com) under the ‘tips and tricks’ tab. Good luck!