

Crib & Room Acclimation

Does Your Child Seem to Hate Their Crib or Room?

It's not uncommon for babies and children to seem to dislike their crib or room. Sometimes it is simply because it is an unfamiliar place or because they often find themselves alone there. Other times, we see children that have developed a bit of anxiety about their room, crib, or going to bed in general. The good news is that with a little effort this can change and your child will learn that their crib is a lovely, safe, and cozy place.

Over the years we've worked with many families that have had anxiety issues and we continue to be amazed at the quick progress that babies and toddlers can have in melting away anxieties, even in a few days.

What Helps?

Simple routine changes, parent attitudes, as well as grounding and attachment exercises are effective in resolving anxieties. The ideas below are a good place to start.

Play Sessions

Play sessions in the crib are generally the fastest way to help your child feel good about their sleep space. Don't worry that your child will associate the space with play and not sleeping, especially with babies and toddlers. If they don't feel good about their crib, they will not feel good about sleeping in it anyways. You can always phase out the play sessions when they are no longer needed.

How to help your child feel good about their bed using play sessions:

- Do short play sessions in the crib one or more times a day
- Stay with your child and interact
- You can use toys or books to entertain or distract your child
- Remove your child before they get upset
- Try to gradually increase the length of these play sessions in the crib
- Consider staying in the room without engaging your child
- If your little one cannot be happy in the crib for even one minute, start with having play sessions in front of the crib or in the same room as the crib and contact a Sleep Consultant for the next steps

More Time in the Room

Spend more time in the child's room during the day in general by playing and doing routine tasks. Some families spend little to no time in the child's room before the day they decide to put the baby to sleep in there.

Be Relaxed

Be relaxed about the child's anxieties. Try to take a matter-of-fact attitude and calm yourself first before attempting to calm the child. Children can pick up on the parent's stress and feel unsafe. If you think this might be an issue at bed time, try this exercise:

Before putting your child down to sleep, take 2 deep, cleansing breaths; on the second, exhale, and lay your child gently into the crib.

Stay Grounded

Try grounding techniques. There are a number of different activities that we use with parents to melt away stress and anxieties. The goal of these activities is to use simple strategies to calm the child from negative feelings. Here is one that can help:

Calmly take your child around their bedroom and slowly point and name the objects in the room. Another variation of this is to say 'goodnight' to the objects in the room.

Strengthen Attachment

Working on strengthening your child's attachment can also play a vital role. There are several attachment exercises that improve connection and secure feelings. Here is a simple attachment strengthening exercise:

Spend 5 minutes a day (or more) doing one-on-one child directed activities. During this time, do whatever your child wants to do. If you are not sure, simply sit on the floor and let them come to you and follow their lead.

Another idea which most parents think sounds a little crazy is to post a life size photo (head shot) of one or both parents in the room. Younger children can relate better if the size is more realistic so an 8x10 headshot usually works well. Research shows that this is helpful for children in dealing with separation, including specific research with children in daycare settings who are given a picture of Mom to keep in their pocket. The children will take it out and look at it from time to time and be comforted.

Conclusion

It's important to consider your child's feelings about their sleep space and work on acclimating them to this space before working on any sleep issues. If they don't feel safe and secure, they will have a difficult time sleeping.