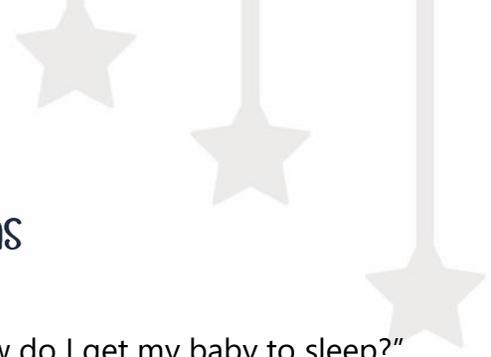




Milestones and Regressions



As a sleep consultant, the most common question I am asked is “How do I get my baby to sleep?” That probably comes as no surprise. A close second to this is, “Is there a [insert month of choice] sleep regression?” followed by “How long is this going to last and how do I get through this?”

Getting your baby on a nighttime routine feels great. Finally, you feel like you’ve got this whole sleeping thing under control and totally know what to expect each night. Then, out of the blue, your nights are turn upside down and you find yourself starting from scratch.

There are many apps that track your baby’s development, and there is lots of hype about “developmental leaps”. It’s easy to begin feeling anxious when your app denotes change on the rise, especially when it comes to sleep. After all, you worked so hard to get your baby sleeping well.

This guide aims to shed light and clarity on these said regressions, tell you more about what’s actually happening, and give you tips on how to maintain your baby’s sleep through.

Table of Contents

- What is a Sleep Regression?..... 2**
- When Do Regressions Happen? 2
- 4 Month Regression..... 3
- Tips to Get Through 5**
- Hold Steady 5
- Daytime Practice 5
- Let Baby Figure It Out..... 5
- Rolling 6
- Sitting 6
- Standing 6
- Maintain Consistency 7
- Separation Anxiety – the social-emotional Milestone 8**
- Suggestions for Easing Separation Anxiety 8
- Cognitive development 11**
- Language Development..... 12**
- Conclusion 13**



What is a Sleep Regression?

Sleep regressions are when a baby or toddler suddenly changes their normal sleeping patterns. Many parents use the term sleep regression to mean their baby or toddler, who's been sleeping well, suddenly and often without any warning, begins waking frequently at night and/or refusing to naps during the day and other odd sleep disruptions that were not present, even the day before.

These regressions are usually related to developmental milestones or "leaps" as they've become better known as, and should be temporary, with your baby's sleep returning to normal within a week or two.

So, if your baby is learning to crawl or just discovered how to roll, this will likely not come as a surprise, but developmental milestones are likely to cause disruptions to a baby's sleep.

Fun fact (well, maybe not so fun for your sleep!) research has shown that developmental milestones are linked to disruptions in a baby's sleep. Developmental milestones- or "leaps"- happen all throughout childhood.

When Do Regressions Happen?

The most common ages for these regressions to happen are 3-4 months, 8-10 months, 12 months, 18 months, and 2 years. These regressions are usually related to developmental milestones or "leaps" as they've become better known as, and will be temporary, with your baby's sleep returning to normal within a week or two.

Developmental milestones include rolling over, sitting up, crawling, pulling up/standing and walking, the major skills that happened during your child's first year or two of life. Development in language, cognition, and social-emotional (separation anxiety) can also cause some sleep disturbances.

Unfortunately, it's not a one-time thing either- sleep regressions will occur throughout your baby's life as they grow and develop.

But what is actually happening?

While your child may be experiencing a temporary regression in sleep during these "leaps", they are actually progressing in their development. This temporary disruption in sleep is due to the need to organize and master their new skill. When babies are learning a new skill, their bodies and brains are biologically wired and driven to practice the new skill to mastery. Once your baby conquers her new skill, you will find that the need to practice during naps and night sleep will subside and your baby should go back to sleeping well.

Whether your baby is learning to roll over, learning to crawl, or learning to talk, it elicits an excitement. They get a real thrill out of this newfound ability and they are going to practice it over and over. In the morning, in the afternoon, and when they wake up in the middle of the night, and that excitement is going to make it a little more difficult for them to get back to sleep during the night.



4 Month Regression

Between your baby's third or fourth month of life, there is a permanent reorganization of sleep, as your baby develops adult-like sleep patterns. It is the only true sleep-related regression, but it is actually a progression, a marked developmental milestone in your baby's sleep.

As a newborn, their sleep is drastically different from that of adult. Newborns really only have two stages of sleep; REM- an active cycle where you may see baby moving, twitching, and NREM, a quiet stage of deeper sleep. Adults have four stages, ranging from very light to very deep. Newborns spend close to equal amounts of time in each stage. There are often less sleep disturbances, since they are in deeper sleep 50% of the time.

Between three and four months, your baby will undergo a biological shift, "graduating" to a four-stage cycle, that they will follow for the rest of their lives.

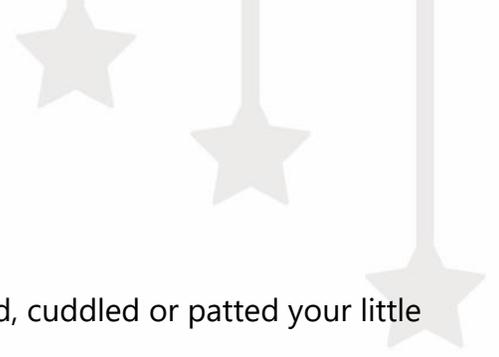
They will develop two additional sleep cycles which are both lighter sleep cycles. With this change, your baby will now only experience the deeper sleep about 25% of the time, and lighter, more active sleep cycles the remaining 75%. As a result, your baby will wake easier than she did in the past.

When infants begin to incorporate these "lighter" stages of sleep, there is a much greater potential for them to be woken more easily from environmental noises as well as their natural biology which brings them closer to the surface during these lighter phases of sleep.

As adults, we also "come to the surface" of sleep and this brief awakening is one that we don't remember the next morning as long as certain comforting truths are in place: we are in our beds, it is still dark out, and we have hours to sleep until morning. These periods of transition are so brief and so benign, that we have no conscious memory of them when we wake the next day.

Infants experience similar sleep patterns and will "come to the surface" of sleep





just as often as we do as adults. But, let's say you have nursed, rocked, cuddled or patted your little snuggle bug to sleep, and then put them down in their crib, when they wake - even briefly - between sleep cycles, chances are they realize you are no longer nursing (rocking, holding, cuddling them). They realize that they are not where they were, or who they were with when they fell asleep.

Suddenly, they are in a situation that is vastly different from the one they are used to falling asleep in and it's confusing! This can be startling enough to cause a full-blown wake-up instead of a smooth transition into the next sleep cycle.

The other issue is that babies at this age are quickly becoming more cognitively aware of their surroundings.

This means that infants who rely heavily on help to fall asleep (like nursing, bouncing, rocking, etc.) are more likely to protest when these are absent during the night because they have learned that they need those very specific circumstances to be able to make sleep happen for themselves.

Up until now, you may have been sailing through, rocking your baby to sleep and everything had been fine. But, if your little one believes they need certain circumstances to fall asleep, these developmental changes can cause major problems.

This is where teaching independent sleep skills becomes so important.

Many babies that practice independent sleep skills from the newborn stage will breeze through this "4-month regression" period, and continue on into infancy with very minor, if any, sleep obstacles.

For those babies that experience their sleep regressing at this point, it is time to work on allowing baby to fall asleep on their own, so they can start to put themselves back to sleep when they transition sleep cycles. If you need help, please email me and we can discuss how a sleep plan can help your family.



Tips to Get Through Hold Steady

I see a lot of parents looking for a “solution” in during these times. In trying to get their baby’s sleep back on track, they tend to lose the consistency they worked so hard to create. They’ll move bedtimes around, start rocking or feeding baby back to sleep, change up the bedtime routine, anything they think might help.

The best advice I can give you is to hold steady.

Although you can’t fix the situation, you can make things inadvertently make things harder for both you and your baby in the long-term.

Adopting a bunch of quick-fixes in order to get your baby sleeping quickly is very likely to end up creating dependencies that will last longer than the development of the new skill.

Sleep disturbances or regressions that are truly associated with developmental milestones or “leaps” shouldn’t last longer a week or two (unless we’re talking about the 4-month sleep regression, which is the only true and permanent sleep regression). Anything longer than this, you might want to take a good look at what’s really going on.

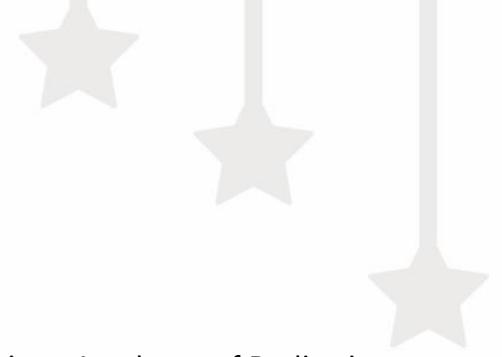
Unfortunately, and probably the answer you want to hear, you’ve just got to get through!

Daytime Practice

Like with any other skill, the more you practice the better you get. Set aside specific times during your day to allow your baby to practice her new skill, 2-3 minutes a day, at least 3 times, so that she’s less inclined to practice during sleep times. So, if you notice your little one is on the verge of something new, allow for practice time during the day so that it’s less likely to disrupt your nights. Practice makes perfect!

Let Baby Figure It Out

Many parents ask me whether they should intervene if their baby has rolled to their tummy, is sitting up when they’re supposed to be sleeping, or is cruising around the crib. My answer is usually, “no”. A good rule of thumb is that as long as your little one is safe; you can give them some practice figuring out a comfortable sleep position on their own. This also helps promote spatial awareness of their sleep environment.



Rolling

If your baby is able to roll independently in both directions, the American Academy of Pediatrics states that it is safe to allow baby to remain in the position he assumes in for sleep. If your little one is unhappy on his tummy, or gets stuck, you may have to go in and roll them onto their back.

Go in, offer them some comfort, tell them it's still bedtime, help them get back into a comfortable position if they've gotten themselves pushed up against the side of the crib, or roll them onto their backs if they've flipped. Make sure to let them get back to sleep on their own, that way, once they've got this new skill mastered, they'll still have the ability to self-soothe when they wake up at night.

Sitting

If your baby has started falling asleep while sitting at bedtime or in the middle of the night, I wouldn't stress too much about this one. Your baby will learn quickly that it's much more comfortable to sleep laying down than sitting.

If it bothers you, you can go in and gently nudge your baby over, at the risk of waking her. If she wakes, you'd treat it as you would a night waking, however you generally handle those, again ensuring she is allowed to fall back asleep on her own. Be aware, it may take a long time to resettle.

Again, during the day, the more you can help them practice laying down from a sitting position, the sooner your baby will be able to do this on their own in the middle of the night.

Standing

If your baby knows how to get from standing to laying on her own, leave her standing. She will eventually lay down, learning that it's much more comfortable to sleep laying down than standing. If you are concerned for her safety reasons, if you notice your baby falling asleep standing, you may go in and lay her down. No need for baby to get hurt if you can prevent it.

If they are wide awake but you are uncomfortable with them standing, you can certainly go in and lay them down occasionally, but be mindful that this doesn't become a fun new game. Babies learn fast, "Oh this is what I need to do to get Mommy in here to play with me." Not such a fun game at midnight! This game often continues on, until you put an end to it.

Remember, what looks uncomfortable to us, is not always the case for our little ones. I've known kiddos, my own included, to sleep in some strange positions. Use your judgement here. Allow them to assume the position they deem comfortable for sleep. Have faith that once they've gotten this new skill mastered, they will still have the ability to put themselves back to sleep during those night wake ups.



Maintain Consistency

My best advice, and the key to getting through these "leaps" without long-term effects to your little one's sleep is to resist the temptation to put a band-aid on a temporary "problem".

Adopting a bunch of quick fixes to get your baby sleeping when they wake in the middle of the night is likely to create some bad habits that'll last longer than the development of the new skill.

So, don't give in to the temptation to rock or bounce them to sleep, don't let them sleep in the swing, don't take them for car rides, and above all, don't nurse or feed them back to sleep. Once success is achieved with their new trick, they will go back to their old, better sleep habits.



Separation Anxiety - the social-emotional Milestone

Separation anxiety can look like an unpleasant or “bad” thing, but separation anxiety is completely normal, expected, and a sign of a healthy attachment between parent and child.

Separation anxiety typically starts to occur around 6-8 months of age, when your little one starts to realize that things continue to exist, even when they’re not in sight. It’s a cognitive milestone known as “object permanence” which is defined as, “the understanding that objects continue to exist even when they cannot be observed.”

In other words, out of sight no longer means out of mind.

As your baby begins to grasp this concept, they realize that if you, their favorite person in the whole world, are not there, you’re elsewhere. That can be a little heartbreaking. This realization for baby is cause for full-blown panic; the a loved-one leaving and not returning is anxiety provoking for most of the adults, so it is understandable that a baby has a strong reaction when navigating this stage.

As normal and as natural as this developmental phase is, it’s not always pleasant. Leaving your child with a babysitter, dropping them at daycare, or simply trying to use the bathroom can turn into an absolute horror show! More than “What is causing this?”, let’s talk about “How do I prevent it?”

Suggestions for Easing Separation Anxiety

We want to make sure that we are helping our little one cope with their anxieties in a healthy way since we can’t always be by their side. If you’re struggling with a child who is pitching a fit every time you try to run an errand or head out for a date night, I’ve got some suggestions to take the edge off until this phase runs its course.

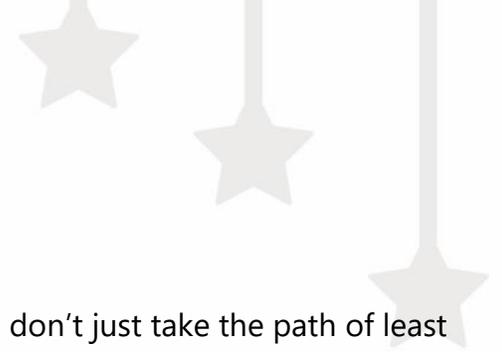
These suggestions for little ones. who are dealing with ordinary, everyday separation anxiety. There is also a clinical condition called Separation Anxiety Disorder which is more serious and warrants a trip to your pediatrician if you suspect your little one might be outside the realm of normal anxieties.

Lead By Example

Your little one follows your cues so if you’re not willing to let her out of your sight, chances are they will begin to feel- albeit unconsciously- as though they are not safe if you leave the room.

Designate a safe space in your home where your child can play and explore a bit without your direct supervision.

One thing that can help - even before your child goes through this stage - is practicing planned separation. This could mean playing peek-a-boo with a large blanket so your younger baby can practice watching you disappear and reappear again, or, while your little one is happily playing, walking out of the room saying, “Mommy will be right back” and then returning a few seconds later. These activities can help your child become accustomed to the idea of leaving and returning...and that when you “disappear,” it won’t be for good! Mommy may leave, but she always comes back! It’s a small adjustment, but it can have a tremendous impact.



Don't Avoid It

Learning about separation and reunion is an important milestone, so don't just take the path of least resistance and stay with your child 24/7 until they're nine (or nineteen) years old. (It happens. Believe me!) Validate your child's sad feelings when you have to leave and reassure them that you'll always come back. If there are some tears, that's alright. Separation and reunion are important concepts that your child needs to learn.

Start Slow

When you begin practicing planned separations for longer periods beyond playing peekaboo or using the bathroom, make it short. When leaving your child with a babysitter or other family member, don't plan on dinner and a movie or an overnight for your first attempt. Run to Target or grab some coffee and build from there.

Start with A Familiar Face

Kids usually do a bit better when they're left with a grandparent or family friend who they've already spent some time with and who've they've grown to trust a little. If your little one is newly resistant to your absence, leave dad or grandma at home while you're out and about.

Of course, living far away from family or rocking the single-parent life makes this not always possible. Plus, you and your partner certainly need a date night every now and then. In this case, I would invite any new babysitter over prior to your outing to get your little one familiar with their new friend.

Stick Around for a While

In addition to a previously planned meet-and-greet, invite your child's caregiver over with sometime to spare before you actually have to walk out the door. After your sitter, parent, or friend arrives, plan to hang around for twenty minutes or so. Seeing that this is someone you're familiar with and trust can go a long way in reassuring your child that they're "good people" and worthy of their trust.

Use Age-Appropriate Language

Instead of telling your child how long you'll be gone, tell them when you'll be back as it relates to their schedule. "Mommy will be back after you wake up from your nap." Or, "Mommy and Daddy will be back after dinner when it's time for bath." This will help give them a tangible timeframe to hold on to as toddlers aren't usually able to grasp the concept of time.



Face The Music

Many of us have, at least once, attempted to distract our babies or toddlers and then sneak out the door without saying goodbye in an attempt to avoid a meltdown. Please, please, please, don't think you can ease crying or protesting if you sneak away. Always prepare your child for your departure, whether that's you leaving for work, going out for the evening, or just saying goodnight at bedtime. You don't want your child to be playing nicely and then look up and realize that you have disappeared. Imagine what might go through their mind: "Where have you gone?" Will you come back? Next time, I'm not going to let go of your leg because the moment I went off on my own, I lost you."

As your child gets older, you can create a nice goodbye routine with special hugs, high-fives, and key phrases. Even if it provokes some tears, it's important for your child to understand that you are going to leave sometimes but you will always come back when you say you will.

Establish a Routine

Much like bedtime, a solid, predictable goodbye routine can help your little one recognize and accept the temporary separation. A set number of kisses and hugs, a memorable key phrase, and a clear indication of when you'll return should be just the right balance of short but reassuring.



Cognitive development

Children grow and develop rapidly in their first five years. Around the age of 12 months and 2 years old, there are huge surges in cognitive development, in addition to physical milestones, that may lead to temporary disturbances in sleep.

Cognitive development means how children think, explore and figure things out. It is the development of knowledge, skills, problem solving and dispositions, which help children to think about and understand the world around them. Brain development is part of cognitive development.

As a parent, it is important to foster your child's cognitive development from birth because doing so provides the foundation for your child's success in school and later in life.

To promote your child's cognitive development, it is important that you actively engage in quality interactions on a daily basis.

Examples include:

- Talking with your baby and naming commonly used objects.
- Letting your baby explore toys and move about.
- Singing and reading to your baby.
- Exposing your toddler to books and puzzles.
- Answering your child's "why" questions

Another example is expanding on your child's interests in specific learning activities. This may be your toddler might show an early interest in dinosaurs, so you can take him/her on a trip to the natural history museum to learn more about the time that these creatures roamed the earth.

Another way that you can foster your child's cognitive development is to provide her with choices and prompt him/her to make thoughtful decisions. You should also allow your child to explore different ways of solving problems. While you may want to provide some gentle guidance and encouragement, allow your child some time to figure out things, like a new puzzle. This may require some patience on your part, but it will ultimately help him/her to learn.



Language Development

The first 3 years of life, when the brain is developing and maturing, is the most intensive period for acquiring speech and language skills. Talking to and reading to your child will have a big effect on how well your child is able to communicate later. In the short-term, these periods of language development may cause temporary sleep disturbances, or regressions.

Toward the end of the first year, your baby will begin to communicate what she wants by pointing, crawling, or gesturing toward her target. She'll also imitate many of the gestures she sees adults make as they talk. This nonverbal communication is only a temporary measure, while she learns how to phrase her messages in words.

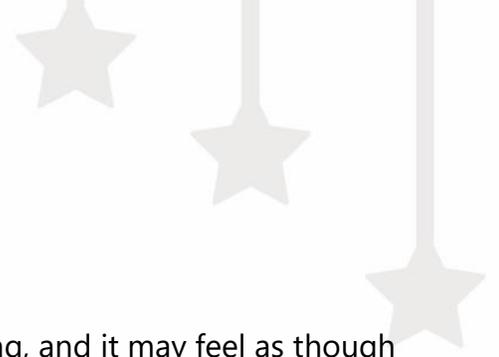
You'll begin to notice the coos, gurgles, and screeches of earlier months now giving way to recognizable syllables, such as "ba" "da" "ga" and "ma". Your child may stumble onto words such as "mama" and "bye-bye" quite accidentally, and when you get excited, she'll realize she's said something meaningful.

There is another language explosion around 18 months of age, which may coordinate with the "18-Month Regression" or an interruption to your child's sleep skills. Language explosion is one of these stages, where the child's vocabulary increases at an incredible rate over a short period.

New talkers begin to make great strides in language development at around 18 months, adding words to their growing toddler vocabulary at a remarkable rate. This "language explosion" helps your toddler's word bank grow from a few words at age one, to 1,000-2,000 by his third birthday. It's around this time, too, that he starts combining words to form simple sentences, like "More milk".

Another age you may notice sleep regressions related to language development is at two years of age. Two-year-olds not only understand most of what you say to him, but also speak with a rapidly growing vocabulary of fifty or more words. Over the course of this year, he'll graduate from two- or three-word sentences ("Drink juice", "Mommy want cookie") to those with four, five, or even six words ("Where's the ball, Daddy?" "Dolly sit in my lap"). He's also beginning to use pronouns (I, you, me, we, they) and understands the concept of "mine" ("I want my cup," "I see my mommy"). Pay attention to how he also is using language to describe ideas and information and to express his physical or emotional needs and desires.

It's important to remember that not every child is the same. Children reach milestones at different ages. Talk your child's pediatrician if you are suspicious that your child is not developing speech and language skills appropriately.



Conclusion

During these regressions, it can feel quite challenging, even frustrating, and it may feel as though like one skill gets mastered just in time for another one to start developing, but hang in there. The whole time this is going on, your baby is also developing the ability to better consolidate nighttime sleep.

So, stay consistent and hold faith in your child's sleep skills. These phases are temporary. Once your little one has mastered her new skill, you can expect even more of those glorious sleep-filled nights once the storm has passed. It's when parents start making radical and drastic changes that things start to fall apart.

If your little one has recently mastered a new milestone, but sleep hasn't been restored, e-mail me and we'll figure out the best support option to get your little one back on track with good sleep.

Disclaimer: The information contained in this document is confidential, and is only intended for the recipient. It may not be used, published or redistributed without the prior written consent of Chasing Dreams Sleep Consulting, LLC.

Medical Disclaimer: The information in this guide is for informational purposes only and is not meant to be substituted for recommendations made by your child's pediatrician or other trusted medical provider. Please follow your parental intuition and the advice of your doctor when determining appropriate care practices.