

Safety Precautions for Parents When Sharing the Bed with Their Child

The “Family Bed,” or parents sharing the bed with their children, has existed since the dawn of the family unit. Over the years, cultural values and scientific research has assessed and reassessed the importance of this aspect of parenting.

Whatever a parent or caretaker’s view on the issue, many precautions can be taken if caretakers decide to share the bed with their children. When sharing a bed with an infant, a parent or caretaker needs to consider the following safety precautions:

- Use a firm mattress. A soft mattress can result in infant suffocation.
- There should be no gaps between the mattress and the frame of the crib or bed. Infants and small children can become wedged in gaps and asphyxiate.
- Bedding should fit tightly around the mattress. Fitted sheets that become loose from a corner can cover and smother a baby.
- Avoid strings or ties on all nightclothes (both baby’s and parents’). These pose a strangulation risk.
- Avoid soft bedding and other items, including comforters, pillows, featherbeds, stuffed animals, etc. Each of these poses a risk of suffocation.
- Keep baby’s face uncovered to allow ventilation.
- Put baby on his or her back to sleep. Babies sleeping on their backs are less likely to become victims of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
- Adults should avoid smoking. Exposure to tobacco, both pre- and post-delivery, is associated with a higher risk of SIDS.
- Avoid overheating the room in which the baby sleeps and avoid overdressing the baby. Overheating is associated with an increased risk of SIDS.
- Avoid placing a crib near window treatment cords or sashes. These pose a strangulation risk.
- A parent’s very long hair (at or approaching waist-length) should be pulled back and fastened. The hair can become wound about the baby’s neck, posing a strangulation risk.

- Adults using alcohol or other drugs, those taking over-the-counter or prescription medication that may cause them to sleep too soundly, and those suffering from extreme exhaustion should not bedshare. Such adults may not be aware of the baby, creating a risk of overlying and suffocation.
- Head/foot board railings should have spaces no wider than those allowed in safety-approved cribs. As with cribs, these spaces can become places for baby to become entrapped and suffocate.
- Do not bedshare in a waterbed. The surface of a waterbed can prevent ventilation if baby moves to a face down position.
- Avoid placing an adult bed directly alongside furniture or a wall. Babies and young children can become trapped between the bed and other furniture or a wall and suffocate.
- Do not sleep with baby on sofas or overstuffed chairs and do not put baby to sleep alone in an adult bed. (Both of these practices put baby at risk for wedging, entrapment and suffocation.)