

Sleeping with the babies

I had not heard of “the family bed” when my first son was born four years ago. But somehow, I could not surrender him to the lonely nursery when we brought him home from the hospital. That first night, I slept with him on a daybed we had put in the nursery. He was nestled in the crook of my arm the whole night. I didn’t get much sleep, but I couldn’t let go of him.

After several weeks of this, I persuaded my husband to allow me to return to the master bedroom, still with our babe nestled in my arms every night, while the crib gathered dust in the nursery. Four years later, my firstborn frequently falls asleep in my arms, or snuggled up next to me in what has become “the family bed.” His younger brother does likewise. And I am discovering one of parenting’s best kept secrets: lots of American parents do this, despite all advice to the contrary.

It’s not socially acceptable to admit to sharing a bed – or even a bedroom – with your children in this country. A variety of parenting books decry the practice as “indulgent” and encouraging “dependence” in children. Considering that newborns can’t walk, talk, feed themselves or even see properly, I think it’s a little premature to worry about developing their sense of independence. I would consider a newborn who thought of himself as independent delusional. After all, when do we turn kids loose to fend for themselves in this country? Age 4? Age 12? Age 22? If my youngest son’s current bout of the “terrible twos” are any indication, I



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learn to fall asleep in a crib or bed alone in a room that is fairly dark and quiet. They should not be held, rocked or nursed and will be better off if they are not soothed with a bottle or pacifier, or the radio or television.”

Ferber is the one who recommends putting your child alone in their room and then ignoring their cries for progressively longer and longer periods of time (5 to 15 minutes the first night, working up to 35 to 45 minutes by the seventh night.) Yes, you are supposed to look at the clock and ignore your child’s cries for the specified amount of time. I have talked to mothers who have tried this method and found it excruciatingly painful.

have positively no doubt that he and his brother will be able to separate from me and see themselves as independent individuals when it is appropriate for them to do so. Have you heard of Dr. Richard Ferber? I am not a fan of his. In 1985, Dr. Ferber published “Solve Your Child’s Sleep Problems,” in which he states, “What is best for almost all children, then, after the first few months of life, is to

Mothers *want* to hear, see and touch their children. What do you think drives the sales of baby monitors? Hear your infant! Hear your infant, plus see lights light up when your infant makes a noise! Get the really expensive kind, and get a live-action video of your infant!

Or, put the checkbook away and just go ahead and sleep with your baby.

The point is, some of our common cultural practices have evolved for good reasons (washing your hands before meals). But some of them are just habits (like wearing a necktie) that are so commonly practiced that we not only forget why we are doing it “that way,” we forget that another way of doing things even exists. And that is not necessarily a good thing.

A neighbor’s cat gave birth to four kittens a few weeks ago. Remove those kittens from her side for even a few seconds and she starts letting you know she is distressed by the tone and frequency of her “meow!” and her kittens do likewise. This tends to have the desired effect of reuniting mother and child. Lucky for her the neighbors aren’t familiar with Dr. Ferber – otherwise they’d be likely to put a kitchen timer next to her and tell her to “get over it.”

Sometimes you have to ignore everything else and just trust your instincts.

Tracy Hume of Greeley is a happily married working mother of two sons. Applications for Colorado Voices are accepted in February.