



The Royal College of Midwives

Bed Sharing and Co-sleeping

Position Statement

Introduction

It is acknowledged in the published literature that a substantial proportion of parents co-sleep with their babies, either intentionally, or unintentionally and for a variety of reasons (Ball 2003, Ball 2002, Hooker et al 2001). Successful breastfeeding and better sleep patterns are more common among mothers and babies who sleep in the same bed (Ball 2003, McKenna et al 1997). However, it has been suggested by Carpenter et al 2004, Blair et al 1999 that there is a link between sudden infant death and bed-sharing if parents are smokers or if other risk factors are present.

This position statement builds on the good practice recommendations on babies and infants bed sharing, published by the RCM in 2000 and more recently on advice issued by the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI). It is intended to be used in conjunction with Guidance Paper No. 1 "Bed sharing and co-sleeping (RCM 2004).

Definitions

The practical definitions of bed sharing and co-sleeping used in this position statement, are different to the ones used by researchers in the field of bed sharing and co-sleeping.

Bed sharing is defined in this context as babies sharing a bed with their mother either to breastfeed or to receive comfort.

Co-sleeping is defined in the context where the mother and baby share a bed and either mother or baby or both are asleep.

RCM position

The RCM position remains one of facilitating women's informed choices in maternity and child care and believes that all women and their partners should be informed of the benefits and contra-indications of bed sharing to enable them to make informed choices and decisions about co-sleeping or bed sharing with their babies. Further, the RCM believes that in ensuring the safety of babies, it is crucial to respect and support cultural norms and practices.

RCM recommendations

- The RCM recommends the development of local guidance for mother-baby bed sharing and co-sleeping. This should state the NHS Trust's position on bed sharing and co-sleeping in hospital and at home.
- All guidance should be developed in conjunction/consultation with "mother –to-mother support" groups and communicated to all staff including midwives, ancillary staff, nursery nurses, ward clerks, paediatricians, health visitors and GPs, so that women receive consistent evidence based information.

- The bed-sharing and co-sleeping guidance should be discussed with women during pregnancy and again postnatally, and the information provided to women in a format appropriate to their language needs.
- The RCM recommends that midwives familiarise themselves with the evidence to enable them to discuss the issues objectively with women to enable them to make an informed decision.

References and related documents

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McKenna JJ, Mosko SS, Richard CA (1997). "Bed sharing promotes breastfeeding". *Paediatrics* 100: 214-9

RCM (2000) "Babies and infants bed sharing" in *Midwifery Practice in the Postnatal Period*. Recommendations for practice. RCM. London

UNICEF UK BFI sample policy (October 2003)

<http://www.babyfriendly.org.uk/pdfs/bedsharingpolicy.pdf>

www.babyfriendly.org.uk/parents/sharingbed.asp

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