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## The Culture of Sleep and Child Care

Across the world people sleep in different ways. Some people sleep inside, some sleep outside. Some people sleep in beds, others in hammocks or on mats on the floor. Some people sleep alone, some sleep with a spouse or children or both. Some people sleep only at night, while others value a nap during the day. How, when, and where people choose to sleep has a lot to do with their culture, traditions, and customs. This can include where they live, how their family sleeps, even how many bedrooms are in their home.

Teachers have a role in providing a sleep environment that is comfortable and safe for the children in their care, while honoring families' cultural beliefs. Home visitors may support families in creating safe sleeping arrangements for their babies. Teachers and home visitors can be a valuable resource to families.

What is the culture of sleep in child care? **Here are a few ways that sleep environments or routines might be different in child care from home:**

- A classroom could be more or less active than the child's home environment. This might be especially true for the sleep area. Think about the activity and noise level in a child's home as you decide which space should be theirs for sleep.
- A baby who is held or in a sling much of the time at home might find a crib lonely and frightening. Consider asking parents permission to use a sling in the classroom. A baby who is used to being held might find comfort from being swaddled.
- A toddler who is used to two daytimes naps might have a difficult time adhering to a classroom schedule. Find or create quiet times in the morning when tired toddlers can rest. Have a cozy area in your room where toddlers may lie down with a book or soft toys.

### **What can you do to help infants and toddlers feel more "at home" when it is time for them to rest?**

- Think of sleep and sleep routines as part of the child's individualized curriculum.
- Classroom teachers should meet with a family before an infant or toddler enters your care. This is an opportunity to find out about a child's sleep habits before they join the classroom. When you know how a baby sleeps at home, you can use that information to plan for how they might sleep best in your care.
- Home visitors can approach the topic of sleep with families after a few visits. It is better to have a good relationship with a family before you discuss sensitive topics like sleep issues.
- Brainstorm ways to adapt your classroom to help a baby feel "at home" during rest times. A baby who is used to sleeping in a busy environment might nap better if you roll a crib into the classroom. Some mobile infants and toddlers might have a hard time sleeping in child care because they think they will miss something fun! These children benefit from having a very quiet place to fall asleep. When you have a positive relationship with a baby it will be easier to know what will help them relax into sleep.



## The Culture of Sleep and Child Care (Cont.)

- Encourage families to bring in “a little bit of home” to the program – like a stuffed animal or special blanket. A comfort item from home can help babies feel connected to their family. They might want that comfort all day. The comfort item from home can also help babies make the transition to sleep while in your care. Make sure that babies under one do not have any extra toys or blankets in the crib with them.

- Share with families what you learn about their child. Use pick up and drop off times to ask questions about sleep at home. Parents can share information that could make their child more comfortable in your care. You can be a resource for families about sleep and their child. Remember that parents are the experts about their child.

