



Sound Sleep

and

Secure Attachment

with

Aware Parenting





Introduction



We often think that there are only two broad options with babies, children and sleep:

Either meeting our needs for sleep, OR their needs to be responded to.

That often looks like:

- either trying to help them self-soothe by controlled crying or cry it out, giving them a dummy or a blanket or a soft toy,
- OR putting up with frequent night waking for the first several years, perhaps with co-sleeping and/or breastfeeding too.

We often believe that we can only have our baby/child's needs met, or our own ~ either they are responded to, or we get sleep.

I'm here to offer you a **THIRD OPTION**.

It's where we get to **BOTH** listen to our baby or child's needs **AND** our own.

They get to be securely attached **AND** we get to sleep!



This approach is based on a very different way of understanding babies and children.

In this approach, we see a baby and child's evening behaviours in a very different light.

What if we see a baby's evening agitation,

and a child's wanting to jump on the bed or be 'silly', or run around the house in the evening,

NOT as problems, not as things that we need to 'calm them down' from,

But rather, as clues or flags, pointing to their OWN NATURAL RELAXATION MECHANISM?





Part One

Reframing Sleep



What I love about this approach is that it turns all the things we might have thought about sleep, on their heads.

Here are some reframes:

1. Babies and children want to sleep too! When they feel tired, they want to sleep!

2. Babies and children don't fight sleep. It's us who are fighting their natural relaxation mechanism.

So why don't they sleep when they feel tired, and why does it sometimes look like they are fighting sleep?

3. The things we do to try to get our babies and children to sleep often work against their natural relaxation mechanism, and actually cause them to take longer to go to sleep and wake up more frequently.



4. Instead of thinking that we need to help them feel relaxed enough to sleep, how would it be if we trusted them; and trusted that they actually are trying to feel relaxed?

5. We don't need to choose between our needs for sleep and their needs to be connected and heard. This third approach is a way that means that we can have both sound sleep AND secure attachment.

6. This approach doesn't only help babies and children sleep more peacefully. It also helps them stay connected to their true, aware, compassionate nature. It helps them release stress and tension. It helps them heal from any traumas too.





Part Two

Self-Reflection on Sleep



I find it really helpful to reflect on our own experiences around sleep, to help us understand more about what is going on for our babies and children.

1. When you have uncomfortable feelings bubbling (for example, you had an argument with your partner or friend, or you're concerned about money), **do you find that it takes you longer to go to sleep?** Do you find yourself waking up at night and finding it hard to go back to sleep? Do you tend to wake up earlier in the morning?

2. When you feel tired, **do you find it harder to repress your uncomfortable feelings?** Are you more likely to cry when you feel tired?

3. At the end of the day, **do you like sharing how your day was with your partner** (if you have one), or a friend, or even on social media? If you don't get to share, do you find yourself really wanting to?



4. Do you sometimes use things to bypass your feelings before you go to sleep? Like reading, Facebook, or watching TV? Does reading, Facebook, or watching TV really help you connect with yourself before sleep, or does it actually disconnect you from yourself?

5. Do you notice that if you've had a chance to share about your day and your feelings with your partner or friend, that your body feels more relaxed, and that you go to sleep more easily (unless you only got a little way through sharing about your feelings, and there's still more there, in which case you might find that you wake up, feeling the next feelings to be felt?)

Does reflecting like this give you any insights about what might be going on for your baby or child around sleep?





Part Three

Applying our Learnings



How can our own self-reflections help us empathise with our baby or child?

1. When our baby or child starts taking longer to go to sleep, or waking up more frequently, or waking up early, one of the reasons can be that they have pent-up uncomfortable feelings that are preventing them from feeling relaxed enough to sleep.

~ Do you notice that? For example, after a busy day, even if it was fun, do you notice that your baby or child wakes up more frequently that night or takes longer to go to sleep?

2. Instead of seeing tiredness as painful, doesn't it make sense that, just like we find it harder to repress our feelings when we are tired, so do babies and children find it harder to repress their feelings when they are tired?

~ And how about if we went one step further than that ~ that actually, it's designed to be like that; that we are designed to release uncomfortable feelings before sleep, so that we can feel truly relaxed, and sleep peacefully.



3. Just like we want to share about the experiences of our day, doesn't it make sense that babies and children have feelings about their day that they also want to share too?

~ But babies obviously cannot express their feelings through talking, and that small children also don't find the most relief through talking.

~ Instead, doesn't it make sense that the way they express their feelings TO US, is to cry, laugh or play, WITH US LISTENING TO THEM?

Just as we like to share our feelings and experiences with someone who is present and listening, so do our babies and children NEED US to be with them, to hear them, to listen to them, to acknowledge their feelings.

Babies need to be held when they are sharing their feelings with us, because, otherwise, we cannot be sure that they aren't telling us that they need to be held, rather than they are telling us about the events of their day.

Once they can crawl, toddlers and children still need their feelings heard with loving empathy. Just like we still do, even as adults!





4. Have you ever noticed that you felt agitated, and you read a book or started scrolling Facebook or YouTube and you felt kind of relaxed, but not a real deep relaxation? Might doing those things actually get in the way of you listening to what is really going on for you, and sharing that with someone if you need to?

Might it again be the same for our babies and children?

That when they are tired and we try to 'settle them' or 'get them to calm down', like feeding, jiggling, rocking, reading, singing, distracting, shushing, patting, etc. actually distract them from deeply connecting with themselves and from actually feeling deeply relaxed?

Might those things create disconnection from their bodies rather than helping them feel truly relaxed in their body?

And just as if we distract ourselves from our feelings, we might then wake up later to feel what is really going on, does it make sense that babies and children experience the same?

That when we think we need to settle or calm them or do things to them to make them feel relaxed, rather than simply listening to them, that those feelings are still there, and those feelings bubble up again when they move into a lighter sleep cycle?

Might all that jiggling, rocking, distracting and white noise actually mean they feel less relaxed than if we listened to them and trusted their natural relaxation mechanism?





5. Does it make sense that just as we feel relaxed when we've shared our feelings, that when our baby gets to express her feelings of the day and any pent-up feelings from the past through crying in our loving arms, that she will feel more relaxed in her body too?

And does it also make sense that if we join in with our toddler or small child when she is playing rambunctiously, that just as we feel relaxed after laughing at a comedy show, that the play and laughter will help her feel relaxed in her body too?

See how listening to their natural relaxation mechanisms, and connecting with them there, helps them feel relaxed enough to sleep?





Part Four

The Sleep Recipe



From this perspective, babies and children need **THREE** things to be able to sleep:

1. To feel tired;
2. To feel connected;
3. To feel relaxed.





1. FEELING TIRED

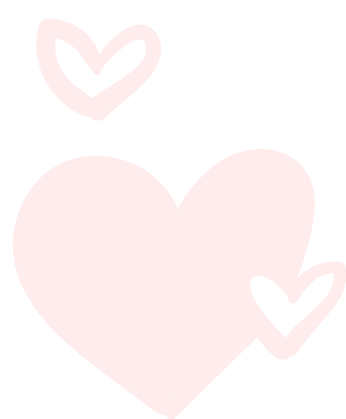
As you might have already gathered, tiredness isn't seen as painful. So, tiredness is indicated by things like rubbing their eyes, yawning, wanting to be close, and being less coordinated.

The other things that we think are caused by tiredness, such as agitation, 'fussiness', crying, being active and 'silly', aren't actually caused by tiredness.

Rather, the tiredness means that they are less able to repress the feelings that are there anyway. The agitation, crying, and playing, are our baby or child trying to express and release those feelings so that they can feel naturally relaxed.

That's their natural relaxation mechanism at play.

So, if we try to do things to stop those mechanisms, and to try to get them to go to sleep as soon as possible, we are trying to bypass their natural relaxation mechanism.





2. FEELING CONNECTED

What helps babies and children feel connected?

Well, having close, aware, present attention when they are tired and when they are going to sleep helps them.

By the way, this doesn't mean that you have to co-sleep, and it doesn't mean that you need to stay with your child whilst they go to sleep until they're 14!

What it means is helping your baby or child FEEL connected to you.

The younger a baby or child is, though, the more they actually need to have you stay there with them to feel connected.

As time goes by, they can internalise that connection, and still feel connected even when you're not with them.





What happens then, if we leave a baby alone when she is tired?

Well, she will need to repress the feelings of loneliness, through things like sucking her thumb or a dummy, clinging on to a blanket or soft toy, getting in a particular position and staying there, or tensing up her muscles. All these things are ways that babies repress their feelings.

(And by the way, if you did controlled crying, cry-it-out, or the extinction method, it's never too late to help your baby or child with those feelings! Our babies and children retain their capacity to heal from, and express, feelings from stressful or traumatic situations. It's never too late to listen to those feelings!)

But tiredness and connection isn't enough. They also need to feel relaxed in order to be able to sleep.





3. FEELING RELAXED

This is the key difference in this approach.

We often don't realise that babies and children have their own natural relaxation mechanism, and we think that we need to do things to them to help them feel relaxed.

So we try to 'calm them down, 'put them to sleep' or 'settle them'.

With a baby, we might try to do that through rocking, jiggling, feeding, patting, shushing, giving them a dummy, wearing them down in a sling, pushing them in a stroller or buggy, or taking them out in the car.

With a child, we might tell them to calm down, stop them from playing, jumping or crying, read to them, sing to them, and so on.

Does it make sense now, though, that when we don't trust that they have a natural relaxation mechanism, and when we try to help them feel relaxed, that those things can actually get in the way of them feeling relaxed?





If you have a partner, and in the evening, your partner wanted to tell you about their day, what would you do?

How do you think they would respond if you offered them food or drink, told them to be quiet, or tried to pat them or jiggle them?

What you would probably do instead, is stop what you're doing, give them your full attention, sit with them, looking at their face and into their eyes if they let you, and nodded and acknowledged them.

What might happen if, when your baby is in your arms and has been fed and changed, and you simply gave her your full presence, not doing anything else, looked in her eyes, invited her to share about her day with you, and listened to her feelings?

Might she then feel free to express the feelings of the day to you, through crying in your loving arms, whilst you listen, connect with her, and acknowledge her?

This is one way that the natural relaxation mechanism works - babies cry in our loving arms when all their needs are met, and tell us about their experiences, in their own language.

Their natural relaxation mechanism works in other ways too.





If your toddler or young child suddenly wants to play chasing games, or gets rambunctious, then this is another part of her natural release and relaxation mechanism - releasing feelings through connected laughter and play.

So, if we trust that natural mechanism, instead of trying to calm her down, we join in with her, and she laughs (as long as she isn't being tickled), she is releasing feelings uncomfortable feelings from her body.

And what about that saying, "It will all end in tears" if we play with our child before bed?

Again here is a reframe ~ after play and laughter, children feel MORE connected with us and will often then share their deeper feelings with us.

Again, you may notice that in yourself as an adult - if someone is listening and connecting with us, then after a while, we will feel safer to share our deeper feelings with them.

How might this look for a child?

They might start pinching or biting when we are playing.

This is a sign that those deeper feelings are coming out.

Then we can set a loving limit with them.





What are loving limits?

Loving limits have no harshness, disconnection, punishment, shame or blame.

Loving limits simply stop the behaviour that is being caused by painful feelings, and gives the opportunity for those feelings to be released, so that our child can feel relaxed again.

We might say something like, “I won’t let you pinch me (that’s the limit), and I’m here and listening (there’s the love).

Loving limits are spoken in loving and compassionate tones, with us coming close and offering our love and support.

Our child might suddenly do things that they know we don’t enjoy.

Then we can set a loving limit.

We might say, “I won’t let you throw your toys, sweetheart, and I’m right here, and I’m listening.”





They may suddenly want water, a book, a cookie, their toy, but when we give them those things, they are still agitated.

Then we can set a loving limit.

“I see you really want me to read you another story sweetheart, and I’m not going to read any more stories now.”

In all of these cases, if they cry and tantrum when we set the loving limit, that is those underlying feelings being released, so that they can feel more relaxed again.

They may suddenly have a big reaction over a small thing and have a big cry or tantrum.

That is their release and relax mechanism in operation! We can simply be there, listening, loving them, telling them that we hear them and we are there with them.

When our baby or child feels tired, feels connected, and feels truly relaxed, through her natural relaxation mechanism, and telling us her feelings through crying, raging, tantrumming or laughing, she can then sleep peacefully.





Part Five

Recap



1. Babies and young children know how to feel relaxed enough to sleep; it's us trying to help them feel relaxed that sometimes works against that natural relaxation mechanism.

2. Babies aren't fighting sleep and children aren't being over the top; they are trying to express feelings so that they can feel relaxed.

3. Babies and children need our cooperation ~ they need to be connected with us in order for those natural relaxation and release mechanism to help.

4. Before they can crawl, babies need to be held in our loving arms when they are expressing their feelings to us when all their needs are met.

5. Once crawling, babies and toddlers will release through laughter (no tickling!), crying and tantrums, with us being there with them.



6. *Tiredness isn't painful. Babies and children cry when they are tired because it's harder to repress feelings ~ it's their natural relaxation and release mechanism in operation.*

7. When babies and children regularly get to express their feelings before sleep through supported crying and connected play, they can be securely attached AND sleep soundly.

8. *Not only that, but they can also heal from any trauma, including birth trauma, and they will also be more relaxed, happy and smiling in the day. They'll concentrate for longer periods, cuddle more and be more cooperative, aware and loving, because they have released and expressed painful feelings to us.*

9. To find out more, see my free articles and videos on sleep at www.marionrose.net and find out more about Aware Parenting at www.awareparenting.com

10. *If you want to dive in deeper, come and have a look at my online course at www.soundasleep.me*

Much love,
Marion Rose, Ph.D.

