

TÚSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

**EARLY
YEARS**
INSPECTORATE

**Safe sleep for
babies and
children**

**Guidance for
Childminders**

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1. Introduction

When you are caring for a baby or young child in your childminding service who requires daytime sleep and rest, it is important to ensure that the sleep environment is safe and suitable and that you have safe sleep practices in place. This guidance document has been developed to support you in providing safe spaces for children to sleep in your home and will help you implement safe sleeping practices that are based on up-to-date research and best practice guidance. All sleep practices outlined in your safe sleep policy should be implemented.

1.1. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

Sadly, babies aged up to 12 months can die suddenly (usually in their sleep) from SIDS, sometimes known as cot-death. It is not known what causes SIDS, but researchers tell us that a combination of factors can affect some babies at a vulnerable stage of their development, which can result in SIDS. We also know that there are actions that can significantly reduce the risks of SIDS occurring. The following guidance sets out mitigating actions that can be taken, which can reduce the risk of SID. You can get more information on SIDS and safe sleep [here](#).

2. Safer sleep environment

All babies and children should be placed for sleep in an area of your home that is conducive to sleep and rest, and where you can be close by to ensure that they are well supervised when sleeping (see [section 4.3](#) for more on supervision).

The sleep environment should be [well ventilated](#), with a normal flow of fresh air either through a window or an air vent. Lighting can be dimmed but the sleep area does not have to be completely darkened, so that babies and children can be easily seen when they are being checked. Cots and beds should be located away from radiators, windows, doors, and plug sockets. There should be nothing within reach of the child when they are in the cot or bed, such as nappy sacks, clothing, blind cords, small objects, toys, or any other objects, personal hygiene products, handbags, medication, cleaning products.

There should be no smoking or vaping at any time when children are present in your home. Smoking is known to be a [risk factor for SIDS](#).

Another known risk factor for SIDS is when a sleeping baby's body temperature rises and a contributory factor to this is high air temperatures in the room/space where babies are sleeping.

The safest sleep room air temperature range for babies under 12 months is from 16-20°C. Children over 12 months will be most comfortable sleeping in a temperature range between 18- 22 °C. A wall thermometer is one way of assisting you to check that the temperature is within the appropriate range. If the temperature is found to be outside of this range, you will need to take measures to ensure that the child is not too hot or too cold. This could mean that you adjust the heating system or use cooling fans as required.

You may need to remove layers of clothing, and it is important that all children are well hydrated and supervised in hot weather. Tusla has guidance on keeping [children safe during hot weather](#) which should help you plan for high air temperatures.

3. Safer sleep equipment and materials

The following should be considered when thinking about the sleep equipment such as cots and other materials that you will need for sleeping babies and children in your care. All sleep equipment should be in good condition and meet all EU safety standards. You can make sure this is the case by sourcing your cots and other sleep equipment from a reputable Irish/EU based supplier.

3.1. Cots and beds

Babies under the age of 12 months require a cot with a firm, flat, waterproof and/or wipeable cot mattress. The cot mattress should be a good fit for the cot and there should be no more than a 2 cm gap between the edge of the cot and the mattress. Beanbags, car seats, soft sleep nests, sofas, cushions, baby swings, buggies, and high or bouncy chairs should never be used for sleeping babies as they increase the risks of SIDS.

Travel cots should not be used for sleeping babies as they are intended for occasional use only rather than daily use, and are usually fitted with thinner mattresses which are less comfortable than standard mattresses and make tucking the bedding in securely more difficult. There are safe, foldable cots which meet EU safety standards on the market. These have solid sides and will fit a standard mattress. This type of cot may be used once the manufacturer's guidance is followed.

If you are made aware by parents that a baby in your care was born prematurely, it is important to know that premature babies have increased vulnerabilities when sleeping. You can read more about SIDS and prematurity at the [Lullaby Trust](#).

Babies must always be placed on a flat and clear sleep space, meaning no pillows, cot bumpers, duvets, soft toys, wedges or sleep positioners (unless prescribed by a medical practitioner). Some babies may come in with a comforter such as a blanket or a toy that can soothe a baby when they are in your home, however it is not recommended that sleeping babies have any soft toys or loose bedding in the cot. This information may need to be shared with parents. If a baby will not settle without a comforter, you should always remove it once they fall asleep.

Babies over 12 months can safely remain in a cot, or they can sleep on floor beds when they start showing signs of being able to climb out of a cot, at approximately 15 months. If floor beds are used from 15 months onwards, they should be fitted with a mattress of at least 6 cm in thickness. Children over the age of 2 years can sleep on mats or beds that are appropriate for their age.

3.2. Clothing/bedding

For babies under 12 months, cotton cellular blankets should be used. A sleeveless baby sleep bag may be used instead of cellular blankets; it should be low-tog, with no hood and

should be the correct size for the baby. When purchasing bedding, always source from a reputable supplier to make sure they meet EU safety standards. Do not use any additional covers with a sleeping bag.

For babies and children over 12 months, lightweight blankets are recommended, but they can be used with children of any age as they are easy to kick off if a child feels too hot. A child aged over 2 years can be offered a pillow at nap time, but they are not recommended for younger children and should never be used for babies under 12 months.

Babies and sleeping children of all ages should not be overdressed for sleep: a nappy (if required), and a vest and light clothing are usually sufficient. Outdoor clothes and shoes should always be removed. Sleeping babies and children should never wear hats, hairbands or bibs while sleeping. Amber bead teething jewellery must never be worn; further information in relation to this is outlined in guidance from the [CCPC](#).

Older children will be comfortable in clothing that is appropriate for their age and in accordance with the temperature of the room. Use less clothing in warmer weather and be careful to not add heavy clothing or too much additional bedding in cooler weather as this can cause the child to overheat.

Parents may request that you swaddle their baby. If you are going to swaddle, make sure you use a thin material that is swaddled securely to prevent the material from coming loose. The Lullaby Trust has useful information for childminders on [swaddling](#).

4. Safer sleep practices

The following practices are evidenced based to support safe sleep for babies and children of all ages.

4.1. Safer sleep position¹

Babies aged 12 months and under should always be placed for sleep on their back (never their tummy or side) and with their feet at the bottom end of the cot. Bedding should be securely tucked in around the edges of the mattress and under the baby's arms to ensure they cannot wriggle down under the bedding.

For babies aged 6 months and under, if you find the baby has moved onto their tummy, you should gently turn them onto their back. Babies 6 months and older who have been placed on their back may turn over onto their tummy while asleep. Once the baby can roll from back to front and back again, on their own, they can be left to find their [own position to sleep](#).



¹ Image source: [HSE](#)

4.2. Soothers

Giving the baby a soother at the start of every sleep may reduce the risk of SIDS. Do not use clips or chains to attach the soother to the baby's clothes or anywhere else in the cot - this is a choking and strangulation risk. Keep soothers clean and never dip them in sugar, honey or other food and drinks.

4.3. Supervision

All sleeping children should be closely supervised. The level of supervision that is required depends on the age of the child and where they are sleeping in your home.

Under 6 months

Babies under 6 months must be closely monitored. They should not sleep in a room on their own without supervision. You will need to locate the cot in an area in your home where they can be carefully monitored, and where you are close by.

This is a vulnerable age for SIDS, so therefore you must commit to checking babies every 10 minutes. This means that as well as being close by when they are sleeping, you should check them regularly, at least every 10 minutes. Baby monitors can be used in conjunction with physical checks. The research and best practice guidance says to check if the baby is asleep or awake, and if sleeping, check their position, if they are breathing normally and if their colour is normal. Also check that they are not overheating and if they appear to be sleeping comfortably.

6 to 24 months

Sleeping babies and children between 6 and 24 months should also be carefully monitored while sleeping. You must carry out regular checks, making sure they are sleeping comfortably. If a child under 2 years is sleeping on a floor bed, they should sleep in an area that has been safety checked and where you can supervise by sight and sound; this could be an open plan area or a sleep space with an open door near and where you are close by.

Over 2 years

Children over the age of 2 may sleep in beds or on sleep mats in suitable spaces in your home where they can be easily monitored by sight and/or sound. If they are sleeping on their own in a separate room, the room should be safety checked to ensure that anything that could harm a child if they wake up and move around the room is removed. Sleep monitors will be needed if children are sleeping in upstairs rooms.

Remember that you will need to think about fire and evacuation procedures for all sleeping babies and children so where they sleep in your home needs to be carefully considered.

4.4. Child-led sleep

Ideally, babies and children should be able to sleep and nap as when they need to. This means that sleep times should be flexible. The HSE has good advice on children's sleep needs and requirements. However, in a childminding setting, we know there may be other

considerations, for example you will need to carefully plan for sleep times if you know you are leaving your home to collect other children.

4.5. Engaging with parents/guardians

Discuss each child's individual sleep requirements with their parents/guardians. This will help you to make sure you are keeping as close as possible to the child's normal routine for day-time sleep and naps. You may wish to share information on safe sleep with parents. You can support parents to continue breastfeeding for as long as possible and to make sure that their child is up to date with their immunisations, as these are both known to offer protection from SIDS.

There may be times when parents/guardians ask you to do something that goes against best practice for safe sleep, for example asking that their baby sleeps in a nest or a bouncer or with a teething necklace. If this happens you should advise parents/guardians why you can't go against best practice guidance and refer parents/guardians to your own safe sleep policy.

5. Supports

If you need any additional supports there are several online sources embedded into this guidance document that may be able to help, or you can ask your local City and Childcare Committee or your local Public Health Nurse for advice. You can find more information on safe sleep and SIDS on the [HSE](#) website, [Firstlight.ie](#) and on [www.mychild.ie](#). You may also wish to further consult [the Early Years Inspectorate's guidance](#) on sleep provision for the wider early years sector, which has additional links and information on safe sleep.

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