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SLEEPING WITH THE KIDS

Written By Karen Skinulis

With all the hype about attachment parenting these days, it's no wonder terms like family bed and co-sleeping have entered our lexicon. The theory in a nutshell is that sleeping with your child helps him/her feel secure and loved, which leads to a happier, better-adjusted child. I have to admit, however, that although I know there's a large grain of truth in the theory — kids do need to feel connected to be happy — I've never been convinced co-sleeping is really a good idea. I've met too many parents who've regretted this decision because it led to difficulties that were hard to overcome. I'd strongly advise considering the pros and cons very carefully before buying that extra-large king-size bed.

The best question to ask is, how will co-sleeping impact me, my partner, and my child? Although enthusiasts report that they love the togetherness, and claim it doesn't interfere with their relationship, I doubt if I'd have felt the same way. I can still remember when we'd tuck our young daughters into their beds years ago. The rest of the night we'd enjoy child-free time. This was when our batteries got recharged after a full day of being on "parent duty." All night, we had room to sleep comfortably. No one was flailing elbows at our heads or tugging on our covers. Plus, we had our privacy for talking, relaxing or whatever else came to mind. For me, our parent-only bed was a much-needed respite from the demands of child rearing.

Most kids would jump at the chance



to sleep with their parents — but remember, once they're invited in, they'll become accustomed to it in no time. Some children will move on to their own beds willingly when they're older, but others won't want to. If your child is in the latter category, it can become a frustrating problem.

I believe this happens (more often than you'd think) because these kids haven't had an opportunity to handle sleep-related challenges like being in a darkened room and waking up in the middle of the night on their own. With no practise, these nighttime challenges feel scary and overwhelming. They've learned to depend on you to feel safe instead of tapping into their own inner resources. Fears often enter the picture, too. The fears are genuine but serve to provide a compelling reason why the sleeping arrangement mustn't change. I'm too scared in my own room. I have to sleep with you. They may even need you to lay down with them just to fall sleep. This ultimately becomes a tyranny — one which will disrupt your household every evening.

Sleeping in their own bed is one of life's challenges, and only by handling it

will they learn how capable and strong they are. Self-esteem is built when we have faith in our children, and nudge them gently towards independence. They must sense you have complete confidence in them, that you know they are capable. When this happens they'll learn to love their bed and their room, and nighttime fears will recede. As for bonding and attachment, hugs and kisses as you lovingly tuck them in will do the trick quite nicely.

KAREN SKINULIS GUEST PARENTING EDITOR



Karen Skinulis is a director at the Ontario Parenting Education Centre and a certified Montessori teacher. Over the last 25 years, Skinulis has taught parenting classes and held workshops for family-focused organizations and corporations across Ontario. She has also co-authored three widely read books studied by both parents and teachers. Her new e-book, *The Parenting Toolkit: Ten Extraordinary Inventions Guaranteed to Solve Real, Everyday Problems*, is now available on Kobo. www.practicalparenting.ca