



## WHAT SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER PROVIDERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SAFE SLEEP



As substance use disorder providers, you have unique and meaningful relationships with families who are working toward recovery while navigating the challenges of parenthood. When a new baby enters the picture, it presents both opportunities and additional stresses for families in treatment. Your trusted position allows you to play a vital role in promoting infant safety through two critical areas: Safe Sleep practices and prevention of Shaken Baby Syndrome. Your ongoing contact with families during pregnancy and the postpartum period creates multiple opportunities to reinforce these life-saving messages while supporting their recovery journey.

### WHY IS SAFE SLEEP IMPORTANT?

Sleep-related deaths are the major cause of death in infants between one month and one year of age. Every year, Maine babies die unexpectedly while sleeping. Over half of these are sharing a bed with an adult. Others die sleeping in something not designed for infant sleep (couch, soft bedding, recliner, swing, etc.) Most of these deaths are preventable. A baby is much more likely to die from unsafe sleep than from a motor vehicle collision.



#### **ALONE**

Share the room,  
not the bed



#### **BACK**

On their back  
for nights and naps



#### **CRIB**

Clean, clear crib



#### **DANGER**

Be aware, know the  
dangers beyond the crib

### WHAT TO DO

Families can decrease the chances of their baby dying from SIDS by following the ABCs of Safe Sleep:

- Babies need their own Safe Sleep Space. A crib, bassinet or portable playard with a firm, flat mattress (one designed for that device) and a snug fitting crib sheet.
- Babies should always sleep alone and close to their parents by sharing a room, but not the bed. Sharing a bed with a sleeping adult puts the baby at risk for suffocation or overlay.

- Babies should always sleep on their back for every sleep period, both naps and nights.
- The crib, bassinet, or portable playard should not have anything in it but the baby—no added soft bedding, blankets, pillows, bumper pads or toys.
- Babies should use a footed sleeper, infant sleep sack, or gown for added warmth if needed.
- Babies should never be around cigarette smoke, even e-cigarettes and vaping devices.
- Drinking and drug use (even some prescription drugs) impair one’s ability to care for a baby, making bed-sharing and other unsafe sleep even more dangerous for the baby. Be sure to counsel families in which there is substance use to always follow the ABCs and that they understand the risk of not following them.

When you work with families that have a baby less than 1 year old ask, “Where does your baby sleep?” Discuss why the ABCs (Alone, Back, Crib) of Safe Sleep are important. If they don’t have a crib or other Safe Sleep Space, you can check with Cribs for Kids at [cribsforkids.org/our-partners](https://cribsforkids.org/our-partners). If the family has a crib, check the safety of the crib on the Consumer Product safety website: [cpsc.gov/cribs](https://cpsc.gov/cribs). You may also want to provide things for families like footed sleepers and infant sleep sacks. Tell them not to buy bumper pads or other soft items for the crib.

## OTHER DANGERS

Sometimes babies cry without reason, especially in the first 2-4 months of life. This can be hard for any parent, and families under stress may find it even harder to tolerate. When the caregiver gets frustrated, there are steps to take to avoid the impulse to shake a baby to calm the crying. No matter how frustrated, a caregiver should NEVER, NEVER shake a baby! This can cause brain damage, and even death.

Educate families on the things that can trigger abusive head trauma and how to avoid it. To keep the baby safe when they cry continuously and won’t sleep, the caregiver should:

- Check to see if the baby is hungry, tired or needs changing
- Cuddle the baby
- Walk and sing with the baby
- Take the baby outside for a walk (weather permitting)
- Give the baby a warm bath
- Call a friend or family member to come watch the baby
- Talk with the baby’s doctor
- NEVER, NEVER shake the baby

Babies rely on adults for their safe care. A baby may not stop crying no matter what is tried. No matter how frustrated a caregiver gets, they should NEVER shake a baby. If a caregiver needs to take time to calm themselves, the baby should be placed in their Safe Sleep Space using the ABCs (alone, on their back and in a crib) and check on them every 15 minutes.

Learn more at [PurpleCrying.info](https://PurpleCrying.info).

