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The impact of sleep training on the mother-child relationship

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Sleep disturbance in early childhood – frequency and impact

- Behavioural insomnia is the most common sleep disturbance in the under-fives age group ^[1]
- Associated with negative outcomes for both the child and their family ^{[2,3][4-6]}
- Interventions such as controlled crying and gradual retreat are the recommended treatment ^[1,6]



Neuroscience and behavioural interventions - contention in the literature

- Interventions
 - Controlled crying
 - Gradual retreat
 - Extinction
- Contention
 - Techniques that ignoring a child's distress may cause damage to infant mental health and the parent-child bond [8-10].



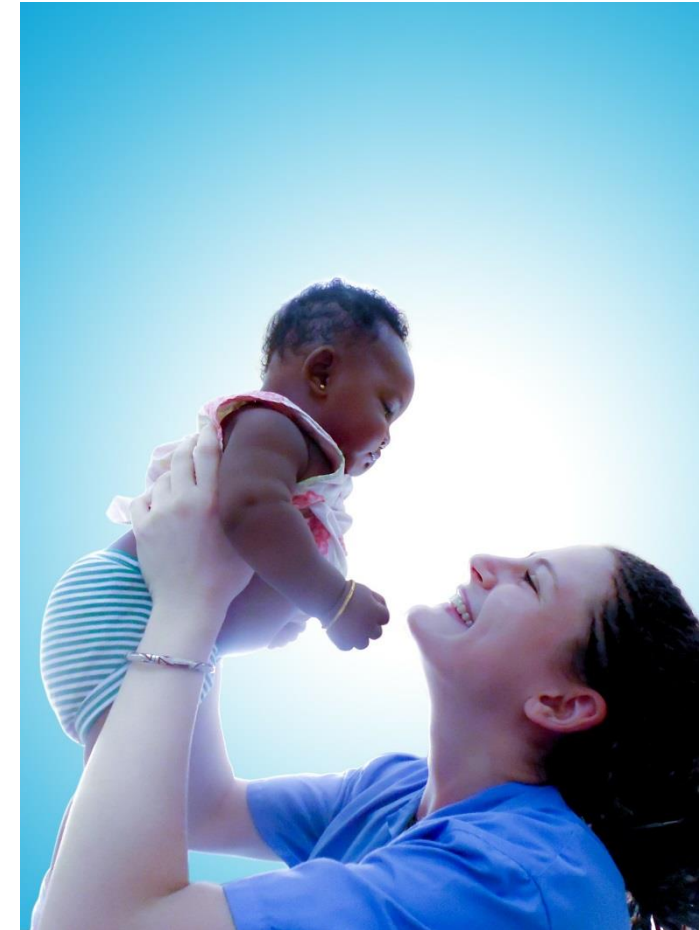
Behavioral interventions and infant stress response

- Middlemiss et al (2012)^[11] found infants' physiological response remained heightened after behavioural cues resolved
- Findings not replicated in two further studies ^[12-13]
 - No differences found between controlled crying, gradual retreat or control group five years post intervention ^[12]
 - RCT found no distinction in cortisol levels or mother-child attachment between children in modified extinction groups or control group ^[13]



Behavioral interventions and maternal mental health

- Low maternal mood is associated with poor infant sleep
- Maternal mood was found to improve in groups offered behavioural interventions compared to control groups in two RCT studies [14-15]
- Prioritising support for managing sleep disturbance could also reduce incidence of postnatal depression



Recommendations for practice

- The current evidence is that behavioural techniques are not associated with harm to
 - infant mental health
 - parent-child attachment
 - and can improve maternal mental health,
- Practitioners working with parents of infants with sleep disturbances can confidently recommend
 - controlled crying
 - gradual retreat



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Questions

