Camping out is a gradual and gentle technique to help children over six months of age learn to fall asleep by themselves.

Camping out is a strategy for dealing with persistent settling and waking problems in young children. It can also be helpful with older children who are having problems getting to sleep, particularly if they feel anxious or frightened.

The idea behind camping out is to help children learn how to settle themselves to sleep, rather than parents feeding, patting or cuddling them to sleep.

**Steps**

1. Place a bed or chair next to your baby’s cot.
2. Lay or sit next to your baby and pat or stroke baby off to sleep.
3. When your baby is asleep, you can leave the room.
4. When your baby is used to falling asleep like this (usually three nights), sit or lie by the bed until baby falls asleep. Do not touch baby.
5. When your baby is used to falling asleep like this (usually another three nights), move your chair or bed away from the cot a short distance (30-40 cm). Remain in the chair or bed until your baby falls asleep.
6. Move your bed or chair gradually towards the doorway and out of baby’s room. This could take a period of 1-3 weeks.
7. If your baby wakes overnight, return to the chair or bed (at the point you are up to with settling). Stay there until baby goes back to sleep.

**Important points about camping out**

- When sitting or lying next to your baby, keep things quiet. Do not talk to or play with baby.
- Try to avoid making eye contact while you’re settling baby.
- Some babies can get very angry that parents are not picking them up.
- Resist the temptation to pick baby up. If you do, you run the risk of reinforcing this habit. Your baby will eventually learn that you are there for comfort, but not for picking up.

If things haven’t improved after two weeks, talk to your doctor or child health nurse. They’ll be able to help you develop a program tailored to the needs of your child.

**Getting support and further help**
Camping out is not the only strategy you can use. For all the information you need on changing your baby’s sleep patterns, see our Guide to solving sleep problems.

Research suggests that working with a trusted child health professional increases the chance of success. Consider obtaining such support before you begin using the camping out technique. Read more about getting help with settling babies.

More to explore
- Controlled comforting
- Positive bedtime routines
- Towards independent sleep
- Changing your baby’s sleep pattern
- Calling out and getting out of bed
- Baby sleep
- Baby sleep: 2-12 months

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