# Cosleeping

Sleep is an important factor in all of our lives as it affects both physical and mental health. In recent decades, the topic of families cosleeping has become controversial. The term cosleeping is broad and simply means caregivers and children sleeping in the same place. Cosleeping includes 'bed sharing' as well as 'room sharing'.

In many cultures, cosleeping is the norm and has been practiced for multiple generations. In Western cultures, like the United States, there has been a change in the last century with increasing recommendations to families against cosleeping. In general, American culture tends to value independence and self-reliance more than other societies. This is reflected in the practice of children sleeping separately in their own rooms from a young age.

Many argue that cosleeping is a natural and health approach for families. It can help with nighttime breastfeeding and soothing of infants. It can also provide bonding time between parents and children. Others find cosleeping a practice that often becomes problematic when parents attempt to transition children back to their own beds. Over time, it can lead to sleep deprivation of family members and have significant impact on daily functioning. Sleep problems in kids can result in sleep problems in caregivers.

Cosleeping can be a means for parent to manage bedtime anxiety of children. Children currently have higher levels of anxiety than in the past; these anxieties can be heightened in times of high stress. Some experts would argue that a child learning 'self-soothing' strategies is a better means of managing this anxiety. Strategies can include reading a book at bedtime or practicing breathing and calming exercises. It can be a means for resolving bedtime tension but can lead to habits that are difficult to break, particularly once children reach their pre-teen years.

It is not uncommon that during times of stress, children's behaviors may 'regress' or return to behaviors that they had previously grown out.  Types of stress that can cause this include family conflict, divorce, changes in school or home life, illness. The covid19 pandemic has certainly affected

## Tips for sleep and bedtime anxiety:

**Routine**- it is essential for a family to have a schedule of activities that occur in sequence each evening. Structure is reassuring for kids.

**Electronics off**- The lights from TV's, phones, x-box, ipads arw confusing for our body. Bright lights tell the body it is time to wake up. Youtube videos and games are enjoyable and entertaining which also stimulates the brain. Turning off electronics an hour before bed allows the mind to prepare for sleep.

**Reading**- reading a book with one's child can be a soothing bedtime ritual. Reading can be an excellent opportunity for bonding as well as reducing anxiety. An audiobook may be a good alternative.

**Calming Skills**- simple breathing techniques and meditation scripts can be settling for children. Simple yoga poses and stretches can also help the body relax. When children learn to calm their own bodies they  feel empowered. Just as with any new skill, practice is necessary for good technique.

children and parents and changed daily routines.  Regressive behaviors are often temporary and can be addressed by tending to a child's needs. Once the child is better able to cope with the change or the stress resolves, their regressive behaviors return to to the appropriate developmental age.

The main point is that cosleeping occurs in families for a number of reasons. It is not a 'one size fits all' approach. What is most important is how it suits and affects one's family. Cosleeping can be a positive and natural routine for a family. It can also arise in times of stress and heightened anxiety and be a short-term solution to sleep difficulties. For families in which cosleeping is problematic, steps can be taken to slowly transition children back to their own bedrooms. This can be a challenging habit to break, but is important if sleep quality is being affected.