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)\textsuperscript{[11]} found infants’ physiological response remained heightened after behavioural cues resolved

• Findings not replicated in two further studies \textsuperscript{[12-13]}
  • No differences found between controlled crying, gradual retreat or control group five years post intervention \textsuperscript{[12]}
  • RCT found no distinction in cortisol levels or mother-child attachment between children in modified extinction groups or control group \textsuperscript{[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
References


References


Questions