

Health concerns:

Cot death

Charity The Lullaby Trust offers advice on educating parents about sudden infant death syndrome, and supporting those affected...



For over 40 years, the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths (FSID), which re-launched in April as The Lullaby Trust, has been supporting parents who have experienced the tragedy of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), more commonly known as 'cot death.' SIDS is the sudden and unexpected death of a baby for no obvious reasons. For some babies a post-mortem examination may explain why they died, but for others no cause will be found. Not having an answer for their baby's death compounds the grief of parents.

In 1991, our campaign to ensure that infants slept on their backs helped to reduce the number of SIDS cases by 70 per cent. Yet despite great success, sudden infant death is still with us, claiming the lives of five babies in the UK every week.

The Lullaby Trust has pledged to halve the number of SIDS deaths by 2020. This is an enormous challenge, but research shows that more lives could be saved if parents and carers followed our safer sleep recommendations. Early years practitioners are key to the success of our campaign to prevent more deaths; we know parents are greatly influenced by the practices they see professionals use with their babies, and practitioners' access to parents offers an excellent opportunity to demonstrate life-saving advice.

Reducing the risk

The following are the safer sleep recommendations:

- Always place your baby on their back to sleep.
- Keep your baby smoke free during pregnancy and after birth.
- Breastfeed your baby, if you can.
- Place your baby to sleep in a separate cot or Moses basket in the same room as you for the first six months, both for daytime naps and night-time sleep.
- Use a firm, flat, waterproof mattress in good condition.
- Never sleep on a sofa or in an armchair with your baby.
- Don't sleep in the same bed as your baby if you smoke, drink, take drugs or are extremely tired, or if your baby was born prematurely or was of low birth weight.
- Avoid letting your baby get too hot.
- Don't cover your baby's face or head while sleeping or use loose bedding.

The parent demographic affected by SIDS has changed, and 74 per cent of babies who die today are born into families experiencing a range of social and economic problems combined with high levels of smoking. Maternal smoking is a major risk factor for sudden infant death, and mothers under 20, who are more likely to smoke during and after

Advice & support

The Lullaby Trust offers a range of support for professionals and parents. We offer free on-site training, where one of our trainers can talk through our advice and provide copies of our new leaflet for professionals. We have a new freephone information line for parents and professionals (0808 802 6869), have redesigned our key Safer Sleep for Babies leaflet for parents, and produced a simple picture-based, easy-read card which gives clear reminders of the top pieces of advice.

The Lullaby Trust also provides specialist services for bereaved families, including, a dedicated bereavement line (0808 802 6868), a befriender scheme for parents, grandparents and siblings, a parent forum and an In Memory site, where families can light candles and leave dedications.

This year, we're also celebrating 25 years of our national bereaved parent support service, the Care of Next Infant (CONI) programme, which we run in partnership with the NHS. CONI, which is health visitor-led, supports parents before and after the birth of their next baby. The service is highly rated by families, who are offered weekly or regular contacts at home with their health visitor; a 'baby passport', which gives them priority access to a paediatrician; a symptom diary; and a breathing movement monitor. Together, these elements provide significant comfort and reassurance during the frightening early months of their new baby's life.

All Lullaby Trust resources can be downloaded for free from lullabytrust.org.uk

pregnancy, are now five times more likely to have a baby die suddenly and unexpectedly than those over 30. It has been estimated that over 100 babies a year could be saved if no pregnant woman smoked. The Lullaby Trust is working with a coalition of organisations to find better ways to encourage more women to quit.

The Lullaby Trust has helped to reduce SIDS deaths in the UK, but over the last few years the numbers have plateaued and there is a distinct possibility that deaths will rise if the safer sleep messages do not reach all parents. With your support in raising awareness of the advice we will save more lives.