

The Nap of Luxury

When it comes to daytime sleep for infants, whose needs come first?

For most parents of young babies, naps are a big deal. In fact, ensuring enough shut-eye (but not too much), at the right times, can turn into the Holy Grail of early years parenting. Some families rely on routine, others are determinedly baby-led – and at the same time, in a daycare setting, there are generally multiple infants, not to mention staff commitments, to consider. Is it fair to expect a paid carer to ‘keep David awake past 5pm’/ insist that Imogen is cuddled and rocked every time she ‘seems sleepy’? Or to hand a cranky child back to mum and dad at 6pm because he ‘wasn’t tired at naptime’? *TN* asked practitioners and parents for their views...

THE CARERS

1

Susanna Dawson, registered childminder and chair of the National Childminding Association (ncma.org.uk)

"I always try to work in partnership with the parents to ensure each child's individual needs are met. One of the benefits of being home-based is that I can plan my day around the children's routines and mostly will only have three children under five anyway. Where possible, I try to ensure every child gets the sleep they need. It can be hard for some children who may have had a bad night's sleep, so their normal routine of, for example, a one hour sleep after lunch can leave them still exhausted. Good communication with the parents or carers at drop off and pick up time ensures that children's individual circumstances can be taken into account."

2

Emma Foster, nursery manager, Child First, Aylesbury

"Experts tell us that a child under one needs 11 hours sleep in the night and three in the day. So it's not just about tiredness – as childcare experts we share with parents the needs and benefits of rest as an essential part of the development of the brain in early years. While parents very often want us to stick to 'routines', free access to space to rest and sleep exists in all of our nursery areas – even our nine-month-olds can put themselves to bed in our specially designed, floor-level cots they can, and do, crawl into (cots available from shanticot.co.uk). To get it right, we work with new families joining us to form a relationship where we can blend the needs of the children and the routines of the family, but throughout the process, the child always comes first."

THE PARENTS

1

Alison (30) has two children in daycare – Willow (4) and Rowan (2) each for a couple of days a week

"To me, it's important that a nursery understands what is right for my family in respect of each individual child. Willow rebelled against any kind of schedule from the start, but Rowan very much liked the security of a routine. I wanted a nursery that would allow them to nap when they wanted; where staff would help them to drop off, and absolutely never leave them to cry."

2

Shane (46) and Hannah (33) have a 12-month-old son, Archie, who attends nursery two days a week

"Luckily we have a self-regulating child and a sympathetic nursery. Having learned early on if Archie wasn't interested in napping then no amount of crying, swaying, snuggling or driving was going to make him do so, the nursery have experimented with cots, rockers, cushions and cuddles to find the best way to ensure that if he does decide to take a break, his environment is set up for him to do so."

3

Emma (35) sends her daughter Kitty (2) to a childminder for three days a week

"My daughter is always a nightmare at bedtime on the days she spends with the childminder. We are dropping her daytime naps at home but she still sleeps for an hour or so at the childminder's house three times a week. I know her childminder thinks she is too young to drop her nap but last night she didn't sleep until gone 9pm, so I think I'm going to have to insist she follows the same routine as us from now on..."