

## Sleeping like a baby

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A princess has been born! Will and Kate may be parents already, but the royal couple are about to experience a new dynamic to family life; before they only had *a child*, whereas now they have *\*children\**. I'm really happy for their family, but I'm also cheekily wondering how the couple will adapt to not only looking after a newborn but also looking after an older sibling simultaneously. While I imagine they will get a lot of support from an army of carers and nannies, I'd like to think that the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge will shoulder most of the responsibility of nursing and raising their children together. Oh, the chaotic joy!

My wife and I can't afford the luxury of hiring a nanny, and although we have 3 times the number of children, to be honest we're much happier raising my children ourselves. That being said, we're both utterly exhausted. The last week has been incredibly challenging, for me juggling work and family, for my wife juggling between a newborn and the other, older children. We knew that things would be this crazy; having rehearsed this routine five times previously, we're quite familiar with the trials associated not only with newborn babies but also balancing their care with the care of older infants. I've slept less than 3 hours a night several times this week and the house is a little more untidy than we normally allow it to become. (My wife and I feel like it looks like a disaster, but since we both maintain very high standards of order it's actually not all that bad.)

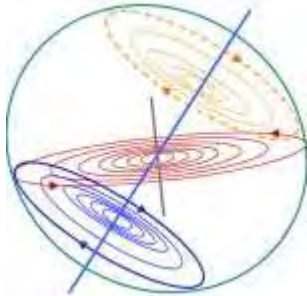


Ironically, the biggest challenge I find is not dealing with the newborn. He's really easy going. He sleeps a lot, and although his waking moments are unpredictable day or night, he's easily sated with a quick nappy change or the provision of a maternal milk supply. Now and then he enjoys lying on my left shoulder while I pace up and down the room – an exercise I repeated with almost every one of our children – which gives my wife a chance to be free to do something else rather than holding a baby all day. No, he's easy to look after.

The biggest challenge is the child immediately older than the newborn. Child #5 in our family is only 15 months older than her younger brother, still a baby herself. While she migrated from our bedroom to her bed in the girls' room remarkably seamlessly, her bedtime routine can be arduous. As with all our children at this age, I like to lie down with them as they fall asleep at the end of the day. I don't believe in leaving a child to cry as a way of training them to fall asleep by themselves; I feel that's a rather traumatising form of torture for such a sensitive and vulnerable young person at such an impressionable stage of developmental formation. By lying next to my child, I reassure them of my presence and they can feel comfortable and secure knowing their parent is nearby. Plus if they decide to jump out of bed I can quickly help the infant back under their blanket.

With child #4 I had perfected the art of lying on the edge of the bed with my arm hanging off the side so that I could use my mobile phone to keep productive during these moments of falling asleep. I could check emails, catch up on some news, browse social media, and respond to text messages. This helps me stay awake, as I might otherwise fall asleep next to my child, which would result in an hour lost napping uncomfortably and waking up to feel groggy and uninspired to do anything else that evening. Transferring

this routine to child #5, however, hasn't been so successful. She is more demanding, preferring me to face her. Most evenings she is tricky to settle, taking a while to enter that zone of peaceful calm from which she can drift into sleep. She far prefers to bang her head against the headboard of the bed, climb over her papa or escape from the bed entirely. And she thinks it's hilarious. To her it's just a game. From experience I know that by feigning to be asleep myself, my child is encouraged to follow suit. We are creatures that learn by imitation, after all. However there's a risk that my act may result in a performance that is so convincing it isn't pretend any more. Recently my wife has rescued me from my daughter's bed on several occasions. On the evenings where she wakes up and I have to repeat the routine, my wife has had to wake me twice in the same night! Perfecting this discipline takes more zeal than doing zen meditation alone on a mountain. (Disclaimer: I have never tried doing zen meditation on a mountain.)



Then there are the nights during which I fail to reach my own bed, instead spending the entire night in the bed of one of my children. And the bed I share with my wife apparently doesn't just belong to the two of us, as we frequently wake up with several other members of the family joining us. (It's paradoxical that such small people take up so much space in my comparatively large bed!) I miss uninterrupted nights. I miss lying in. I miss being able to cuddle up to my wife under the covers safe in the knowledge nobody is going to unexpectedly join us.

But would I do things differently? Never in a million years. There's a privilege in spending, what is in the life of a human being, such a short period of time together with my child, forging deep emotional bonds that will last a lifetime. The attachment forged during these testing bedtimes will, I believe, allow future tests to be passed more easily, with my children safely anchored to me in their hearts. The parent-child relationship is the axis of the universe, according to Father Moon, so I want to live my life as if the whole world hinges on this relationship.

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