

# Co-sleeping and adoption – Why we did it

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I'm old fashioned and that extends to my parenting. I've always believed children should sleep in their own beds. Their own bed being not my bed. I know the trend has moved toward more co-sleeping or "the family bed" in recent years, but I've always been a firm believer that situation wasn't for me. My bed is for my husband and me. For sleep — my sleep. For sex and relaxing. There's nothing relaxing about waking up in the middle of the night with a someone's stinky little foot shoved in your ear. Nothing.

I understand occasional bad dreams may bring a child into the parents' bedroom. Saturday morning snuggles with cartoons in bed with mom? I'm down. I'm not a complete ice cube, but I've never believed co-sleeping was something that was right for our family.

Until it was.



My husband and I adopted a 2-year-old in 2012 (he's now 6). Our social worker and members of our adoption support group encouraged co-sleeping as a bonding tool. Trying to bond with a newly adopted toddler who's not clear on what's going on brings its own set of challenges. We were advised to squeeze in as much close, physical contact as we could to establish that parent-child bond.

I was beyond excited, over the moon to be this kid's mom. But co-sleeping? Uh... no. I lovingly transformed our spare room into the coolest kid space ever. EVER. There was a note in my son's case file that said he slept in the same bed as his foster mom. I blew that off and convinced myself he'd happily snooze alone in his little pimped-out Pottery Barn Kids palace.

This did not exactly work out.

Our first six months with Zack are a blur. He was not impressed with the pimped-out Pottery Barn Kids palace. Trying to compromise, I pulled his toddler bed into our room. Fail. This kid was perfectly happy to sleep in our bed and only in our bed. Any movement toward another sleeping situation crashed and burned.

I could get him to go to sleep in his own room by sitting beside his bed and patting his back. He'd snooze for an hour, then wake up crying. I wore a path between his room and ours. It became a nightmare of a routine. Kid cries. Mom goes to kid and pats him back to sleep. Mom shuffles back to bed and sleeps for approximately 26 minutes. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.

I was a wreck. Little things like running low on Diet Coke would send me into a nuclear-grade meltdown. There's a reason sleep deprivation is used as torture. A sleepless night here and there? The human body can suck that up, but every night? We're not built for that.

After a few months, Zack would sleep in his own bed for two to three hours at a stretch. Hello REM sleep. Instead of crying for me to come in, he started tiptoeing into our room and crawling in our bed. He'd wedge contentedly between my husband and me. I guess the fact that he was sleeping longer and coming to us instead of crying for us to come to him was a sign he was becoming more comfortable. I went from getting up with him every hour to three or four times a night.

We kept insisting co-sleeping wasn't for us, even though our small human was telling us otherwise.

Looking back, I don't know why it took us the better part of a year to buy a king-sized bed and accept things as they were. My old-school notions of what parenting should look like didn't include a kid in our bed every night. I had to bend.

Regular sleep for everyone won. For whatever reason, Zack needed to sleep with us and we eventually accepted that. The bonding process seemed like it was going well, but looking back, I see there were underlying insecurities that popped up at night and made him crave that closeness.

I don't wish for many do-overs in my life, but if I could turn back the clock, I'd let Zack sleep with us from the get-go. I wish I'd have been more open to his needs and less rigid in my thinking. I will never get that time (or lost sleep) back.

Co-sleeping didn't put a damper on my sex life because guess what? Women who are rested are interested in sex with a human being instead of making love their cup of coffee. We both had more energy to get creative and find time to be intimate. What did

hurt my marriage was being a crazy woman who bit my husband's head off with almost no provocation and being so zoned out we couldn't communicate. Not experiencing the joys of REM sleep did put a strain on every part of my life, especially being a wife.

Things got better when everyone started sleeping regularly. And, parent sex only takes a few minutes, right? Please say that's not just me. Where there's a will and five minutes, there's a way, but if one partner is a walking zombie, you're probably not getting that kind of action.

Not all co-sleeping families are gung-ho about co-sleeping. We did it because our child needed it... and in the end, I needed sleep more than I needed to be right. If all signs point to co-sleeping as the best thing for your child, rewind and consider your position... and yes, your position might be the fetal on three inches of mattress space, but at least you'll be sleeping. Sort of.

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