

# The Diversity of Love Journal

## Love and Co-Sleeping in Childhood

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Sharing a bed with another individual is commonly associated with love and loving. Like other animals that live in groups, many humans sleep together, although this can vary based on culture and age. In many cultures, co-sleeping, or sharing a bed with a family member, is normal. Why so?

## Sleeping Together Among Animals

This way of sleeping together is found even among animals. Recent studies on animal sleep behavior have demonstrated that sleep is affected by the presence of surrounding animals. For example, olive baboons exhibit reduced sleep duration with larger group sizes, whereas mice are capable of synchronizing their rapid eye movement cycles (Chakravarty et al., 2024).

## The Cultural Practices of Co-Sleeping Across Cultures

Sleeping together and bedsharing are common cultural norms, with some variations across cultures and at different stages of the life cycle (Andre et al., 2021; Mindell et al., 2010).

Co-sleeping between caregivers and infants is prevalent across many societies, with rates reaching 60–100% in certain regions of South America, Asia, and Africa, and smaller rates of co-sleeping in Western societies. In western societies, many people expect to sleep alone, with a romantic partner, or with a spouse (Mindell et al., 2010).

## **Developmental Benefits of Co-Sleeping in Childhood**

Evolutionary scientists believe that throughout human history, co-sleeping has been important for keeping babies warm and safe, the crucial factors for their survival (Barry, 2021).

Many cultures view night awakenings as a normal aspect of breastfeeding and development, and they do not expect babies to self-soothe when they wake up (D'Souza & Cassels, 2023; Luijk et al., 2013). Some researchers found that co-sleeping benefits infants' emotional development, promotes parent-child bonding, and aids infants' stress hormone regulation (Barry, 2019; Beijers et al., 2013).

## **Modern Practices of Co-Sleeping**

Nowadays, according to global surveys, co-sleeping during childhood beyond infancy is also relatively prevalent. A survey of more than 7,000 families administered in the UK in 2010 revealed that 6% of children consistently shared a bed with someone until at least four years of age (Blair et al., 2010; Mindell et al., 2013; 2014).

Some families engage in co-sleeping as a remedy for their child's sleep difficulties. In many countries, including certain Western nations such as Sweden, child-parent bedsharing is culturally perceived as an integral aspect of a nurturing environment. Children frequently co-sleep with

their parents until they reach school age (Marakovitz et al., 2023; Welles-Nystrom, 2005).

It is also prevalent for siblings to share a room or even a bed. A 2021 US study revealed that more than 36% of young children aged three to five years engaged in bedsharing overnight, whether with caregivers, siblings, pets, or a combination thereof. Co-sleeping diminishes yet persists among older children, with up to 13.8% of co-sleeping parents in Australia, the UK, and other nations indicating that their child was aged between five and twelve years during co-sleeping occurrences (Mason et al., 2021; D'Souza et al., 2023).

## **The Benefits and Downsides of Co-Sleeping**

The advantages and disadvantages of co-sleeping may vary in children with conditions such as autism spectrum disorders, mental health disorders, and chronic illnesses. These children may encounter increased anxiety, sensory sensitivities, and physical discomfort that hinder their ability to fall and remain asleep. In these cases, co-sleeping can offer them reassurance (Jacquier & Newman, 2017; Köse et al., 2017; Palmer et al., 2018; Sidhoum et al., 2019).

Although common, infant co-sleeping remains a contentious issue. Some Western viewpoints, which prioritize self-reliance, contend that solitary sleeping facilitates self-soothing in infants during nocturnal awakenings. So, it is still unclear whether co-sleeping or solitary sleeping is more beneficial in the modern world of cultural diversity.

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