

Sleep Coaches

An Educational Resource for Parents

What is a sleep coach?

A sleep coach (or sleep consultant) is a general term for someone who provides education, advice, and support services to help improve a child's sleep. While some sleep coaches offer services for older children, adolescents, and even adults, most sleep coaches focus on infants and young children under 5 years of age. Thus, the information provided here refers to sleep coaches who focus on this younger age group.

What kinds of problems does a sleep coach address?

Most sleep coaches help with getting young children to fall asleep easily, sleep through the night, and nap well.

How does sleep coaching work?

A sleep coach should do a thorough assessment of your child's current sleep patterns, taking into help your child sleep better. Many coaches provide follow-up services to monitor progress and adjust the plan as necessary. A sleep coach may meet with you in person, by phone, by video chat, or may communicate by email. Some sleep coaches will come to your home to work with your or with your child directly.

When should I consider seeking sleep coach services?

If your child is having problems sleeping, you should first talk to your child's primary care provider to be sure that there are no medical concerns that are contributing to your child's sleep issues. If your child's sleep problems are due to something medical, such as snoring, other breathing problems, or reflux, your child may first need specific medical treatment. This treatment may be provided by your primary care provider or you may be referred to other medical specialists or a pediatric sleep center. If your child's sleep problems are not medical, you may wish to consult with someone who helps with the behavioral aspects of sleep. Sleep coaches are one such provider, as are specialists with advanced training in behavioral sleep medicine and pediatric sleep medicine.

What kind of training do sleep coaches have?

Currently there are no general regulatory bodies in the US that oversee or certify sleep coaches. Therefore, a sleep coach may come from any number of training backgrounds. Some sleep coaches are licensed healthcare professionals, such as psychologists, nurses, social workers, or occupational therapists. These professionals have met rigorous standards and passed licensure exams in their own field. They may or may not have done additional training/certification specifically in pediatric sleep, behavioral sleep medicine, or sleep coaching.

Most sleep coaches, however, are not healthcare professionals, but have undergone specialized training and earned certification in sleep coaching or are involved in other types of infant care, such as doulas and lactation counselors. The majority of training programs for sleep coaches require completing a structured curriculum and passing an exam. Some also require a period of supervision by another sleep coach before practicing independently. Still other sleep coaches have no formal training and are working based on personal experience.

Choosing a sleep coach

Because the title “sleep coach” does not signify any specific training or certification, it is important to carefully review an individual's qualifications to best determine if he/she can help with your specific situation. If you decide to seek the services of a sleep coach, here are some important questions to consider:

1. What is the person's background and training?
2. How long has the person been in practice?
3. Is the person a licensed health care provider? Is the person certified? If so, what kind of license and/or certification? What kind of training was involved?
4. What is the age range and types of sleep problems that the person helps manage?
5. How long has the person been practicing as a sleep coach?
6. How many families has the person served?
7. What is the person's sleep coaching philosophy?
8. How long will the sleep learning process take? What is the average number of visits/encounters needed? Over what period of time?
9. How are services provided? In person? By phone? Via the Internet? Some combination?
10. Will the person come to your home? How hands-on is the person's approach, and if so will they be alone with your child?
11. Will a written plan be provided for my child?
12. How long does the sleep coach usually continue working with a family once the immediate problem is solved?
13. What happens if the plan doesn't seem to be working? Will follow-up support be provided?
14. Will the person be in contact with your primary care provider?
15. Does the person have a consulting relationship with a behavioral sleep medicine and/or pediatric sleep specialist, if further evaluation and treatment is needed beyond sleep coaching?
16. How much do services cost? Are there tiers of service that offer more or less support? What is included with these services? Are the services covered by health insurance?