**Self-Settling Tools**

* Engulf Hold
* Cupping and patting
* Shushing

**The ‘Engulf’ Hold**

As the name suggests, this hold provides as much body contact as possible giving your baby the sense of being completely contained as if in the womb.

It positions your baby in such a way that you can initiate other settling techniques simultaneously. In addition, it also provides warmth, intimacy and the meditative beat of your heart.

Most mothers/fathers prefer using their dominant arm to support the baby’s body from underneath. Choose whichever side feels most natural to you.

Hold your baby so that her/his head is resting on the upper region of your non-dominant arm. For mothers, this ensures that their baby is not too close to their breast where she/he could be easily distracted by being close to their milk supply.

Draw your baby in close so that you are pressed tummy to tummy with your baby’s face nestled just below the top of your shoulder. Your palm will be on your baby’s bottom with her/his legs tucked up into your body and supported as such by your forearm.

With your non-dominant arm, reach around your baby’s shoulder and take hold of her/his arm to steady it, in other words to control the startle movement.

For this technique to be effective, there should be no eye contact or communication between you and your baby. Allow your own body to do the nurturing.

**Patting and Cupping**

Patting or cupping your baby’s bottom or lower body mimics your baby’s heartbeat and reassures your baby of your presence.

Patting is a rhythmic, firm and repetitive action done with your palm flat.

Cupping is a stronger action and is done with a cupped palm, incorporating both cupping and a short but gentle thrust forward of Baby’s body.

Both patting and cupping can be done in your arms or adapted for the cot.

**Shushing**

Shushing is a long, low sound, resembling air being released from a tyre.  It should be loud enough so that your baby can hear it over her/his cry. It is thought that babies respond to shushing because it is similar to the sound that they experienced when in the womb.

**Dummies (optional)**

If you allow your baby to wind down before offering a dummy, it becomes a settling tool rather than a prop.

**Props**Babies do not need to be rocked or walked around the block to encourage them to sleep. While movement may seem an obvious method to help soothe a baby to sleep, it becomes the hardest habit to break and interferes with self-settling. It is an unnecessarily labour-intensive approach that often delivers little reward.

Instead, imagine that your body takes the place of the cot in which (your baby) will eventually sleep independently; it makes sense that you remain stationary when settling her/him.

All props, including music, white noise, movement that cannot be done in a cot, dummies (when given straight away to a baby) create bad habits and interfere with a baby’s ability to learn self-settling.

Giving a dummy as a comfort tool is different from plugging a baby when they first go to bed (prop).

**Sleep, Settling and Resettling**

Much of your baby’s first 3 months was spent establishing feeding and sleeping rhythms. Her/His digestive system is still maturing and her/his sleep patterns are still evolving.

In the first 12 weeks your aim is to teach your baby, in a nurturing way, to settle and find sleep unaided and how to stay asleep.

How your baby’s sleep patterns evolve in the first 12 weeks will have depended on you and your household. Keep in mind that daytime rhythms will affect the night rhythms.

This routine is repeated throughout the day and night. With time, the amount of assistance with settling should decrease and eventually Baby will learn how to self-settle.

Once your baby learns how to settle and resettle, she/he will eventually be able to sleep anywhere.

You can’t spoil a baby at this age; they need lots of nurturing and reassurance.

Teaching good sleep habits requires TIME, ACCEPTANCE, CONSISTENCY and TRANQUILITY (TACT)

**Sleep Cycles and Patterns**

It takes a minimum of 10 days to see changes (i.e. you are just looking for a dim light at the end of the tunnel at this stage) and the circadian sleep cycle takes at least 3 weeks of consistency. The changes do not happen over night but will happen over time.

Remember sleeping is a learned behavior.

* **Self-Settling**
* I believe one of the most important skills that parents can teach babies is that of self-settling. It teaches babies how to gain control over their emotional state and this in turn leads to them developing their emotional backbone as they grow. It does not happen overnight and needs to be taught in a nurturing way.
* When you go to bed you read a book, meditate, watch TV, or chat with your partner – a baby can only do one thing and that is cry. There is nothing unhealthy about a baby crying before going to sleep. As a parent, it can be difficult to listen to but as long your baby is happy and contented generally, crying is just part of life. Remember you are not leaving her/him there to cry it out; you are leaving her/him there to give her/him the ability to find her/his own sleep. You will not get anywhere by leaving your baby to cry for hours. You will succeed quicker by giving her/him space and then helping her/him find her/his sleep.
* Self-settling is the key to establishing healthy sleep patterns. It gently teaches babies how to find sleep naturally, without the use of sleep aids, props or interference.
* It is that small window that occurs when your baby starts crying until the moment you intervene to help her/him find her/his sleep. This window initially may be for only a minute or two but as baby grows it increases until eventually she/he will be able to find sleep independently. It is a crucial step in Baby’s sleep development.

**Self-settling does NOT involve leaving your baby to cry it out alone to finally fall asleep due to stress and exhaustion.**

**Settling Cycle**

Little steps will get you there quicker than taking big steps then finding you are not able to stick with it. I work on the principle that it takes most babies/toddlers 20 minutes to wind down before going to sleep and adjust this for each individual.

When putting your baby to bed you should do what I call ‘dump and run” i.e. put your baby in her/his cot and walk away and “do not hover like a helicopter”. Walk out of the room and shut the door. Remember a dark room creates calmness and also signals time to go to sleep. Light is for playtime and dark is for sleeping.

Any insecurity that you may feel in practicing this ‘dump and run’ technique can be alleviated by the use of baby monitors. A monitor with movement, sound and/or camera will provide you with confidence whilst allowing your baby to have a calm environment to have their naps and nighttime sleep.

**First Stage**

Leave to cry up to 5 minutes STOP THINK and ACT – the ACT may be to leave your baby for another 5 minutes OR

* Provide comfort with cupping/shushing. Remember this is to reassure and should be shorter than the crying time.

Then leave to cry up to 5 minutes, you may choose to do just 2 or 3 minutes here to begin with - STOP THINK and ACT

* Provide comfort with cupping/shushing then patting and shushing. Stay in the room until your baby goes to sleep. At this stage if your baby does not go to sleep then you do have the option of picking her/him up and putting her/him to sleep in your arms (see engulfing notes).

**Second Stage**

Leave to cry for 10 minutes then STOP THINK and ACT- the ACT may be to leave her/him for another 5 minutes OR

* You may choose to do just 2 or 3 minutes here to begin with - STOP THINK and ACT

Provide comfort with cupping/shushing then patting and shushing. Stay in the room until your baby goes to sleep.

* Provide comfort with cupping/shushing. Remember this is to reassure and should be shorter than the crying time.

Leave to cry up to 5 minutes, - STOP THINK and ACT

Provide comfort with cupping/shushing then patting and shushing. Stay in the room until your baby goes to sleep.

**Third Stage**

Leave to cry up to 15 minutes then STOP THINK and ACT – the ACT may be to leave her/him for another 5 minutes OR

* Provide comfort with cupping/shushing then patting and shushing. Stay in the room until your baby goes to sleep.
* Leave to cry up to 10 minutes, - STOP THINK and ACT

Provide comfort with cupping/shushing then patting and shushing. Stay in the room until your baby goes to sleep.

**Fourth Stage**

Leave to cry up to 20 minutes STOP THINK and ACT

* Provide comfort with cupping/shushing. Remember this is to reassure and should be shorter than the crying time.

Leave to cry up to 10 minutes, - STOP, THINK and ACT

Provide comfort with cupping/shushing then patting and shushing. Stay in the room until your baby goes to sleep.

**Reminders on settling**

You need to take small steps so depending on how you feel you can do the full cycle above or start with doing two lots of crying and at the end of the second cycle cup/pat/shush off to sleep.

Always try and settle in your baby in her/his cot. It’s harder to resettle her/him if you take her/him out of the cot, but trust me there will be times that you will do this.

Try not to use movement as a calming tool or to put your baby to sleep – this is the hardest habit to break.

When comforting don’t talk or give your baby eye contact – both of these stimulate. Instead, you can use the shush noise and let your body talk to her/him. Also try and stand to the middle or bottom end of her/his body when comforting. Remember we all do end up giving eye contact it is human nature; however, try to avoid doing it as much as possible.

You need to work within both your and your baby’s comfort zone. It is not about leaving her/him alone to cry until she/he is exhausted and goes to sleep, but it is about giving her/him space to find her/his sleep.

The crying isn’t to be crying at the top of her/his lungs for this length of time. your baby may start out loud and slowly reduce and also stop and start.

If the crying is constant at one level and goes for a long time then you need to reassure and see what is happening.

The crying time does depend on the cry but try not to go in under the time frame that you are working with - nothing is set in stone but you do have to push the boundaries to get results.

Do this settling up to 10 days – if it is not working then you need to reassess what you are doing. You may need to step back and allow her/him more time to find her/his sleep.

* **Resettling**
* This is how to get your baby to sleep and to enable her/him to stay asleep.
* Resettling teaches babies how to progress from light to heavy sleep. This is essential to avoid the pitfalls of frequent waking and catnapping. In a sense, resettling is the second stage of teaching baby how to find sleep and does demand more time and patience than settling (TACT).
* Most babies stir or wake when progressing from light to heavy sleep and this occurs anywhere between 20-45 minutes. In the beginning the idea is not to let your baby wake fully during this transition; a sleepy baby is easier to resettle than a wide-awake, crying baby.

Resettling is not about calming them down or staying until they just start to drift off, it is about staying with your baby until they go into a deep sleep.

However, as she/he grows you will need to step back and allow your baby the ability to try and resettle without any intervention.

The aim of resettling is to ensure your baby sleeps for not less than 1½ hours per sleep rhythm. Your baby can also sleep longer than 1-½ hours – ideally 2 to 2 ½ hour naps are what you are working towards.

Generally a baby who does not learn how to resettle will have short sleep cycles and wake during the night without the ability to fall back asleep on her/his own.

**Resettling Suggested Cycle**

**First stage** – you may choose to miss this stage and go onto the next stage.

Respond immediately.

To coax your baby into her/his deep sleep, place one hand over her chest (this is what I call ‘engulfing’ in the cot) and with the other hand begin the cupping action and then progress to gently patting and shushing her/him back to sleep. You can also turn your baby on her side facing away from you and then do the cupping action.

Remove hand from chest and then pat lighter, ending up patting the air. If your baby does not change her/his sleep pattern then leave the room. If your baby wakes then you need to repeat the process and stay with her/him until she/he goes back into a deep sleep.

**Second stage**

Leave to cry up to 5 minutes

Provide comfort by cupping/shushing then patting and shushing. Stay in the room until your baby goes to sleep. At this stage if she/he does not go to sleep then you do have the option of picking her/him up and putting her/him to sleep in your arms.

**Third stage**

Leave to cry up to 10 minutes

Provide comfort with cupping/shushing then patting and shushing. At this stage stay in the room until Baby goes to sleep.

**Fourth stage**

Leave to cry up to 15minutes STOP THINK and ACT

Provide comfort with cupping/shushing then patting and shushing. At this stage stay in the room until Baby goes to sleep.

Comfort - two ways of doing this, you stay in the room until your baby goes into a deep sleep and then you leave OR you can attempt to calm her/him down then leave and give your baby an appropriate time to see if she/he will resettle.

If your baby does not go back to sleep then you will need to stay with her/him until she/he goes into a deep sleep.

Always try and settle in her/his cot. It’s harder to resettle if you take her/him out of the cot, but trust me there will be times that you do this.

You can’t spoil a baby at this age; they need lots of nurturing and reassurance.

Do this settling up to 10 days – if it’s not working then you need to reassess what you are doing.

An example of resettling could be that your baby sleeps for 45 minutes wakes and it takes you another 45 minutes to coax them back into sleep and then they will sleep for another 45 minutes or less or sometimes more. Eventually over time your baby will not wake but continue to sleep through this wakeful period.

**Waking Up**

When your baby eventually wakes from sleeping, enter the room but avoid immediately picking her/him up. Instead reassure your baby with your voice, talking whilst opening the curtains. She/He will feel reassured with your presence.

This process is a subtle way of teaching your baby that her/his crying doesn’t automatically lead to her/him being immediately picked up and therefore not to stress about it.

It is a balance of letting your baby know you are there for her/him yet by not going straight to her/him, you are giving her/him a crucial opportunity to experience her/his own space and her/his own emotions, all the time knowing that you are coming to her/him.