HONOURING OUR BABIES:
SAFE SLEEP CARDS

FACILITATORS GUIDE AND TOOLKIT

2ND EDITION 2017

First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness
The second version of Honouring Our Babies Safe Sleep Guide: 2017 is an update from the Honouring Our Babies: Safe Sleep Cards: Facilitators Guide 2012. The First Nations Health Authority would like to thank Perinatal Services BC and Tripartite Partners for their collaboration and wisdom in taking the lead in developing Version 1. The 2nd Edition includes important messages on safer sleep practices (example: room sharing) and messages on unsafe and less safe sleep practices (example: bedsharing, couch sleeping). This Edition also focuses on the strength of Indigenous knowledge and cultural values and practices.

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Please direct any questions about the toolkit or requests for print copies to First Nations Health Authority at:

resources@fnha.ca
Teachings from the precious babies who left us too soon; what can we do to prevent sleep-related infant deaths?

We all know that babies are precious little beings. We believe babies are sacred gifts from the Creator. We also know that the life cycle, birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence and “Elderhood” and death include different teachings at each stage of our lives.

It seems only natural to look for teachings from the stage of infancy. When we do this, we see that one thing we have learned from the babies who have left us too early as a result of unsafe sleep-related deaths is there are things we can do to prevent other babies from making an untimely departure to the Spirit World.

SIDS is the death of a baby under one year of age which is sudden, unexplained and without a clear cause.

There are accidental/preventable deaths that occur as a result of certain sleep-related practices, such as a blanket covering their head, being placed on their stomachs unattended, parent rolling over their baby and not waking up which results in suffocation. These deaths are different from SIDS as they are preventable.

This resource has two parts to help keep our Sacred Gifts with us longer:

1) Facilitator Guide
2) Illustration Cards

SHARE THESE TEACHINGS WE HAVE LEARNED FROM THE BABIES WHO HAVE LEFT US TOO SOON.

Honouring Our Babies Safe Sleep Tool Kit is here to help protect our Sacred Gifts. Share with everyone to protect our future babies as Sacred Gifts of Life. It is all of our responsibility as moms, aunties, dads, uncles and grandparents to protect the little ones.

For the babies who were only with us for a short time, we are grateful for what we have learned from you so we can protect our future generations of babies and honour your memories in this way.

When a baby (or any person at any stage of life) is called to the Spirit World, the family, community and Nation can come together in ceremony to support the grieving loved ones spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically.

All Our Relations.
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BACK COVER POCKET
17 ILLUSTRATED CARDS
Many Indigenous teachings explain that babies are gifts of life from the Creator. Babies rely on us as parents, families, and communities to love, care for, and protect. Babies are also our teachers who help us learn and grow. Elders’ teachings remind us to think about the whole circle of life. They remind us that the health of each baby, child, adult, family, community and Nation is a result of the balance and harmony of spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical aspects.

Sadly, sometimes our babies leave the circle suddenly and far too early as a result of sleep-related infant death or accidental deaths. Honouring Our Babies: Safe Sleep Tool Kit is culturally relevant and evidence-based to help protect our babies. Many people were involved in creating this interactive tool to share with everyone caring for infants.

**WHAT IS SLEEP-RELATED INFANT DEATH?**

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is the death of a baby under one year of age during sleep or napping. Sleep-Related Infant Deaths are infant deaths that are preventable. SIDS is the most common cause of death in babies between the ages of one month and one year. 90% of sleep-related infant deaths happen before six months old. In Canada, approximately three babies die every week of sleep-related infant death.

The exact cause or causes of SIDS are not known. Based on scientific research, researchers now believe that babies who die of SIDS may be born especially vulnerable to both internal (i.e. inside the baby) and external (i.e. outside the baby) influences.
For example:

- Internal influence - some babies may be born with a medical condition;
- External influence - babies have a high sensitivity to tobacco smoke in the environment.

Even though there is no certain way to prevent SIDS or to predict which babies may die of sleep-related infant death, there are ways to reduce a baby’s risk for sleep-related infant death.

**SLEEP-RELATED INFANT DEATH IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

In Canada, the rates of sleep-related infant deaths are higher among Indigenous babies than among babies of other residents. In BC, research shows that sleep-related infant deaths are approximately four times higher among Indigenous babies than non-Indigenous babies.

The reasons for higher rates of sleep-related infant deaths in Indigenous communities are complex, and may include lower access to prenatal care, higher rates of smoking among pregnant women, being a new mom, poverty, higher teen pregnancy rates and barriers to completing high school or attending post-secondary school. Many of these are considered “risk factors” for sleep-related infant death. A risk factor is something that increases a baby’s risk of dying from sleep-related infant death.

Elders teach that relationships between the environment, living conditions, and history affect the realities of our lives. Indigenous people have had multiple losses, which continue to have an effect on the health of our communities. The effects of these losses of land, culture, community and spirituality have been experienced through the generations. The effects of these losses help us understand why Indigenous babies may be exposed to more of the “risk factors” for sleep-related infant deaths due to environmental factors.
USING THE SAFE SLEEP CARDS

The *Honouring Our Babies - Safe Sleep Illustration Cards* are a “deck” of 17 cards that can be used by anyone to discuss safe infant sleep with parents, families, Elders, and grandparents. The cards have been developed to be interactive, evidence-informed, and culturally relevant.

The front of the illustrated cards has pictures that portray situations that may be “safe” or “unsafe” which allows for discussion. Some prefer to cover the “safe” or “unsafe” and ask the care giver if they feel this is safe or unsafe. You can use these cards by asking their thoughts, feelings, or perspectives on the picture.

Listening respectfully to the parent’s perspective provides them the opportunity to learn and decide how their baby will sleep safer. This is an opportunity for open discussion to share safe or safer sleep circumstances for their babies.

Always thank the parents for sharing their thoughts and perspectives. If a parent shares an unsafe sleep practice, be kind and respectful when explaining the safer sleep messaging with them. It took courage for them to share this. Some parents may not have up to date knowledge and know what research has taught us about sleep-related infant death and the unsafe sleep practices that put babies at risks.

Babies are gifts, and all parents and families share a goal to love, care for, and protect their babies. The key messages in these cards will help parents achieve this goal by supporting them to learn how to keep their babies safe while sleeping.

CREATING A SAFE AND RESPECTFUL SPACE TO TALK ABOUT SLEEP-RELATED INFANT DEATH

It is important to ask families for their permission to discuss safe sleep and sleep-related infant deaths.

By asking families for their permission you are showing them respect. In most cases, families will give you permission to discuss safe sleep. In some cases, families may choose not to discuss safe sleep and sleep-related infant deaths.

There may be several reasons for this. For example, some families may have personal experience losing a baby to sleep-related infant death and are not yet ready to discuss this topic. It is important to respect the family’s choice. You can offer to speak with them about safe sleep at another time, and leave them with some material to read when they are ready.

If families choose to discuss safe sleep practices, it is important to let them know that the discussion can be stopped at any time.
The back of the illustrated cards also contain key messages to help you discuss safe and unsafe sleep practices which guides the parents in making informed choices on safer sleep for their babies.

- The illustrated cards show **safe sleep practices** where the parent’s decisions have helped reduce the risk of sleep-related infant death for their baby. These cards have the word “safe” within a green circle to help you identify them.

- The **unsafe sleep practice** cards illustrate there are risk facts present that increase the risk of sleep-related infant death. These cards have the word “unsafe” in a red circle to help identify them.

- There are cards that show **cultural practices** that keep our babies strong and protected. These teachings were passed down from our ancestors. Ask the parents if they know of any ceremonies around keeping babies strong and protected.

### EXAMPLE OF THE BACK OF THE BREASTFEEDING CARD

**What safe sleep practices do you see in this picture?**

**SAFE SLEEP PRACTICES:**

- Mom is breastfeeding her baby, which helps protect against sleep-related infant death.
- Mom has placed the crib next to her bed so the baby can sleep in the same room as her, on a separate sleep surface. This is called “room sharing” and helps reduce the risk of sleep-related infant death.

**DISCUSSION POINTS:**

- Babies who are breastfed have a lower risk of dying of sleep-related infant death.
- Breastfeeding for at least the first six months is very important and helps protect babies from illness. Continued breastfeeding to the age of two years or more is encouraged.
- Breastfeeding is the normal way to feed babies. Breastmilk is best for babies and also helps moms because it is free and convenient.
- It is also good for mother’s health to breastfeed, and lowers mother’s risk of some cancers and diabetes later in life. Moms who breastfeed may also lose weight easier after birth.
- If you have problems with breast-feeding, it is possible to get help from a public health nurse, lactation consultant, midwife or doula.
- Ask your health care provider for more material on breastfeeding.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CARD</th>
<th>SLEEP SITUATION</th>
<th>TOPIC OR THEME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overview</strong></td>
<td>This card shares information on overall safe sleep practices.</td>
<td>All safe sleep messages to protect baby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1A</strong></td>
<td>A baby sleeping in a bassinet next to his or her parents' bed.</td>
<td>Room Sharing – baby is sleeping in the same room as parent and on a different sleep surface.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1B</strong></td>
<td>A dad is sharing the same sleep surface as baby.</td>
<td>Bedsharing or co-sleeping with baby is sleeping in between parents who may roll on top of baby suffocating baby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1C</strong></td>
<td>Entrapment of baby between sleep surfaces.</td>
<td>Baby can get wedged between bed, wall or end tables.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>A mother is breastfeeding her baby with a crib placed next to her bed.</td>
<td>Breastfeeding is protective against sleep-related infant death.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **3** | A mother is sleeping on couch with her baby sleeping on an alternative safe sleep surface next to the couch. | Alternative Sleep Surfaces: Safe sleep strategy if:  
• Away from home;  
• A parent regularly sleeps on a couch;  
• If an approved crib, cradle, or bassinet is not available.  
Sleep surface is firm and free of hazards. |
| **3B** | Babies are sleeping safely in Alternative sleep places. | Boxes, drawers, tubs, and laundry basket are all safe places for baby to sleep when placed on the floor. |

Perinatal Services BC, Safe Sleep Environment Guideline for Infants 0-12 Months of Age, 2011.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CARD</th>
<th>SLEEP SITUATION</th>
<th>TOPIC OR THEME</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A baby is sleeping in crib and is being exposed to tobacco smoke.</td>
<td>Exposed to tobacco and second-hand smoke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A baby is wearing a hat/toque when being put to sleep and may become overheated.</td>
<td>Infant overheating should be avoided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cultural Ceremony – Welcoming Baby Ceremony.</td>
<td>Ceremonies kept our babies strong and supported by family and community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6B</td>
<td>Baby is being held in a sling.</td>
<td>Baby’s chin is too close to the chest creating a unsafe airway blockage preventing baby to be able to breathe.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 7    | A new mother and father arrive at a family member’s house for a visit after a long car ride. Their baby is asleep in a car seat, and the parents need to decide where to safely place their baby to sleep. | Problem-solving when away from home:  
• Car seats are not approved for safe sleep;  
• Couch is too soft for safe sleep;  
• Empty laundry basket on the floor with a light blanket can provide an alternative safe sleep surface for baby that is firm and free of hazards. |
| 8    | Baby is being cared for while in cradleboard.                                                                                                                                                                  | Cradleboard, papoose boards were the traditional carriers of Indigenous people. The cradleboards provided security and discipline. The babies were always with the parents and never out of sight while they worked. |
|      | International Hip Dysplasia Institute, 2016. www.hipdysplasia.org                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                               |
## SUMMARY OF ILLUSTRATED CARDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CARD</th>
<th>SLEEP SITUATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Period of Purpole Crying. Babies cry and it is important to understand why some may cry more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10A</td>
<td>Sleep Position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10B</td>
<td>How babies breathe while laying down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Tummy Time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC OR THEME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Babies cry for many reasons. Important to learn why some babies may cry more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting your baby by placing baby to sleep on back always keeps your baby safe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The airway is protected when baby sleeps on their back. Baby may find it difficult to breathe when sleeping on tummy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important for baby to get exercise every day and supervised Tummy Time is a great way to help your baby grow strong.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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We ask you to see the link to perinatalservicesbc.ca for information on swaddling.
Perinatal Services BC, the Ministry of Health and FNHA have Developed two new Safer Sleep Resources:

1. Practice Support tool for healthcare providers:
   http://www.perinatalservicesbc.ca/health-professionals/professional-resources/health-promo/safer-sleep

2. Parent Handout: Safer Sleep for my Baby

3. FNHA updated the safe sleep tool kit and can be downloaded:
END NOTES AND REFERENCES


5. Perinatal Services BC. http://www.perinatalservicesbc.ca/health-professionals/professional-resources/health-promo/safer-sleep


ADDITIONAL REFERENCES:
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www.anac.on.ca/Documents/Making%20It%20Happen%20Curriculum%20Project/FINALFRAMEWORK.pdf

American SIDS Institute, *Reducing the risk of SIDS*, 2013. 
www.sids.org/wpcontent/uploads/nprevent.htm

www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile107.stm


www.nichd.nih.gov/sids/Pages/sids.aspx


Additional Resources

Please add local resources to this list and update as needed.

LOCAL RESOURCE NOTES:

QUITTING SMOKING
QuitNow provides free, confidential, no-pressure counselling and support from trained specialists.
Phone 1-877-455-2233,
www.quitnow.ca
HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 or go to
www.healthlinkbc.ca, for information on local stop smoking programs

LOCAL RESOURCE NOTES:

QUITTING ALCOHOL DURING PREGNANCY
HealthLink BC File 38d: Pregnancy and Alcohol Use
www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile38d.stm

LOCAL RESOURCE NOTES:

BREASTFEEDING
Baby’s Best Chance
www.bestchance.gov.bc.ca
HealthLink BC File 70: Breastfeeding
www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile70.stm