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## The Little One Said 'Roll Over'

In a new edition of his book, pediatrician and guru Richard Ferber revises his stance on 'co-sleeping.'



Sage Sohler for Newsweek

By **Martha Brant and Anna Kuchment**  
Newsweek

May 29, 2006 issue - When Mitra Kalita was growing up in New York, her parents—immigrants from India—told her that there was something that she could never tell her American teachers: she slept in bed with them until she was 12 years old. In India, piling into a "family bed" did not meet with the disapproval, even suspicion, that it did in the United States. Kalita remembers that her father, who worked late, would often regale her and her brothers with stories from his childhood in India as they drifted off to sleep. "There was such intimacy," says Kalita, now 29. "And it was the only way to spend time with him." So when she had a child of her own, she naturally wanted to share her bed, too. Not only did it make bleary-eyed, early-morning nursing easier, it gave the working mom extra cuddle time with her daughter, Naya. For her parents, "co-sleeping" had been completely

To Co-Sleep, Perchance to Dream: Katie Rocca and her daughter with Ferber. Mary Grace, 2, slept next to her parents until recently.

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normal. But at play groups around Washington, D.C., Kalita found that many of the other moms had nagging doubts about doing it, in part because they knew the guru of pediatric sleep, Dr. Richard Ferber, opposed it. Even Kalita questioned her own impulses: "I wondered if we would ever get her out of our bed."

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The stigma against co-sleeping has been reinforced by generations of parents and doctors, many of whom followed Ferber's bible of pediatric sleep, "Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems." "Sleeping alone is an important part of [your child's] learning to be able to separate from you without anxiety and to see himself as an independent individual," Ferber wrote in his 1985 best seller. He so dominated the field that his name entered the parental lexicon. "Ferberizing"— training a child to sleep through the night with incremental bouts of crying— provoked strong reactions. Some call him a savior. Others, "the sleep Nazi." Ferber was surprised by how dogmatically people heeded him. Now, in a new edition of his book due out this week, he has omitted his statement about the psychological consequences of co-sleeping. "That's one sentence I wish I never wrote," he told NEWSWEEK. "It was describing the general thinking of the time, but it was not describing my own experience or philosophy."

Solitary sleeping was the norm when Ferber's first book came out two decades ago. But the number of adults routinely sharing a bed with an infant more than doubled between 1993 and 2000, according to the National Infant Sleep Position Study led by the National Institutes of Health. The 2003 study found that in a two-week period, 45 percent of infants spent some time at night in an adult bed. There's growing acceptance of co-sleeping among pediatricians as well. "What ever you want to do, whatever you feel comfortable doing, is the right thing to do, *as long as it works*," Ferber writes.

Those worried that the tough-love doctor has become a mealy-mouthed New Ager needn't fear. He still says bonding is best done during waking hours, and he insists that co-sleepers have a plan for

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getting the kid out of their bed—ideally by 6 months and definitely by 3 years. But the fact that Ferber now accepts, if not embraces, bed sharing is heartening to many. "I'm excited to see him coming out with a more balanced approach," says Maureen Sweeney, 32, of Dallas, who has co-slept with both of her children. "Now maybe people won't think we're quite so crazy."

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), however, says bed sharers shouldn't rest easy. While, as Ferber notes, no psychological harm comes from sleeping together, the AAP says that there could still be great physical harm. In a recent review of the scientific literature, the AAP's Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) task force found that the proportion of unexpected infant deaths occurring while bed sharing has increased. In several of these studies, some 50 percent of sudden infant deaths occurred when infants shared a bed with adults. They blamed suffocation from fluffy pillows and entrapment between a headboard and mattress, as well as SIDS. (Parental smoking or drinking and co-sleeping can also be a deadly combination.) So the AAP came out against bed sharing, refusing even to provide safety tips for those who ignore its edict. "We don't know exactly how to make bed sharing 100 percent 'safe'," says Dr. Rachel Moon, a pediatrician at Children's National Medical Center and coauthor of the AAP's 2005 guidelines. "We have a public-health responsibility."

Proponents of co-sleeping such as James McKenna, who runs the Mother-Baby Behavioral Sleep Laboratory at the University of Notre Dame, say that the AAP is acting irresponsibly. "A sweeping recommendation against bed sharing could be dangerous," McKenna says. "People will go underground and not do it safely." He thinks many of the bed-sharing studies are biased. In his own anthropological work he argues that bed sharing can sometimes be safer than having the baby in a crib because the mother is more alert to her baby. That's been true for Sweeney. "Most of the time I wake up less than a minute before she does," she says of her 7-month-old. "We're completely in sync." Sweeney has gone to great lengths to make bed sharing safe; she doesn't use comforters, and she's put her mattress on the floor. Sweeney and her husband, Paul, plan to get a king-size soon. Katie Rocca of Sudbury, Mass., used a "co-sleeper" that attached to the side of her bed.

For others, such machinations can be impractical and pricey. The business of co-sleeping is booming. There is a growing demand for products like the \$50 Baby Delight Deluxe Snuggle Nest, a foam mat with "breathable mesh" sides that the company suggests can help keep an exhausted parent from rolling onto the baby. The AAP would rather see people use the \$150 Arm's Reach Co-Sleeper because it has a separate sleep surface. Although the group discourages bed sharing, it does advocate room sharing, especially for breast-feeding moms. Mitra Kalita would have given anything to keep co-sleeping. But at about 5 months, Naya seemed to sleep better in a crib in another room. In a partial embrace of Ferber, Kalita has even let Naya cry it out for brief periods. "You realize that as a family you have to come up with what works," she says. Now, with his new edition, Ferber and Kalita agree on one thing for sure: Mother knows best.

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