

The WSJ Helps Pathologize Infancy



By *Jamie Wells, M.D.* — September 4, 2018



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In their zest for trend-spotting, the [Wall Street Journal](#) [2] just published a piece on exhausted new parents seeking out pricey “sleep experts” that reads more like an advertisement for the “small but growing industry of sleep consultants” than a comprehensive take put into relevant context. The author further identifies this as a new fad, which it is not. “Dream teams” have been preying on the vulnerability and fears of new parents for quite some time - look no further than the article’s revelation that

“for fees ranging from about \$300 for two weeks of consultations by phone and text to \$7,500 for 72 hours of in-home coaching, these advisers help parents get babies to sleep on their own.”

There is no question that being a new parent is overwhelming, requires much adjustment, trial and error along with the continued navigation of unexpected obstacles. The reality is that *that* is parenting. Outsourcing the tough stuff may seem like a quick fix, but without a parent developing a capacity to set limits and boundaries the long-term harms become self-inflicting and enduring - for them and their child. And the problems only get bigger. Managing the early childhood bumps in the road hones invaluable skills for the parent that prepares him to handle the challenges of adolescence and adulthood. Instilling in a child that actions have consequences while following through and leading by example are gifts a parent can give that will facilitate the development of an independent, well-adjusted, healthy adult.

The notion “these advisers help parents get babies to sleep on their own” implies there is something pathological about a baby being difficult to get to sleep when it is totally normal for

many infants. The service is also meaningless if the parents don't maintain consistency - which, in general, tends to be the greatest issue when it comes to infant sleep and implementing a schedule in the first place. Let's not forget it is also the natural tendency of the baby to do so anyway, as is their inclination to regress, for example, when teething or battling an illness. Succeeding in getting a baby to sleep through the night is great, but it is not a static event. As they develop and grow, their needs change and the process often requires tweaking and adaptability.

The infant and parent relationship is a symbiotic one. If a parent is consistent and firm, then he can change the behavior of an infant in this realm in a manner of days. The problem is the little babies were made very cute, so it is also totally normal for parents to give in to them. People underestimate how smart the babies are once they are able to sleep through the night and then it becomes a matter of who is training whom. When it comes to sleep, the issue tends to be a parent one, not necessarily a baby one. The parents are an infant's whole world, if they cry and suddenly mom or dad appear, then they learn to continue the pattern.

There is no question that infant sleep impacts an entire family in a household. And, there is no question that sleep is incredibly important for achieving overall optimal health and well-being. But, dynamic discussions with your child's pediatrician about the shifting, evolving demands of a new baby albeit about sleep or alternate concern should quell most fears and achieve reasonable resolutions - and ones that don't cost a fortune.

Certainly, parents should be empowered to make the choices that are best for them and their families. But, alarm bells should go off when "correcting" natural and normal behaviors are excessively costly and involve a company's own self-certification system that is rarely, if ever sanctioned by those who fully understand pathology. In a perfect world, the relationship with your child's doctor would be a trusted one that provides such guidance and comfort - and that is already covered by insurance, warranting no additional fees. If that is not the case, then the best answer might be to change doctors.

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