



Episode 643: The Sleep Lady on Sleep Coaching Your Baby Without Leaving Them to Cry It Out

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Katie: Hello, and welcome to the Wellness Mama Podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com, and this episode is all about babies and sleep, and specifically how to coach our babies to sleep without just leaving them to cry it out. And I'm here with Kim West, whose work I found actually when mine were young and who I'm excited to finally interview. She is a mother of two and a clinical social worker, as well as a family therapist for 30 years, but she's best known as the Sleep Lady by her clients. And over the past 28 years, she has personally helped over 20,000 parents all over the world get a better night's sleep without just leaving their children to cry it out alone. And through that work, she's appeared on every media outlet you can imagine, from Dr. Phil to the Today Show to TLC's Bringing Home Baby and more. And she has a lot of books on this topic for various ages and stages, as well as many other books as well, which I would highly recommend and which I will link in the show notes.

And today we're talking about her approach to sleep and how she became the sleep lady, why she's concerned about some of the common advice that's given to parents about getting babies to sleep through the night and her approach, which is different than the just cry it out method that helps baby sleep and enhances the bonding and connection with the parents at the same time. She talks about her guidelines for

building a solid foundation for a good night's sleep and a few tips that go against common advice but help a baby learn to sleep. We talk about the developmental stages that can disrupt sleep and how to navigate them, as well as her take on if we should bedshare or co-sleep and how to do that safely and so much more. Like I said, her method helped me personally and I know has helped many others as well. So if you have babies in that stage or toddlers who are struggling with sleep, I think you will get a lot of value out of this episode. And let's join Kim. Kim. Welcome. Thanks for being here.

Kim: Thanks for having me, Katie.

Katie: So I have a note in my show, notes that you are an artist as well and that you enjoy, aside from work, getting to spend time painting. And I would love to hear about that. I've actually just recently gotten back to it myself after almost going to school for art in college and a friend getting married and wanted hand painted artwork, wedding gifts. I've just recently got back into the world of painting.

Kim: Good for you. Congratulations. That's funny because I initially majored in art in college, too, and then switched. My mom is an artist. These paintings behind me are from her. And I wish, actually, that I could spend more time in my art studio than I do, but that is on my list. But I do. I love to paint, but I really like to make things, whether it's sewing or jewelry or painting.

Katie: I love that. Well, one area that I'm guessing you do get to spend a lot more time is in the work that you do, which has helped thousands and thousands of families. So I think to start broad, I'm sure a lot of people are already familiar with you, but for those who aren't, can you tell us how you became the Sleep Lady?

Kim: A three year old named me that, and I just thought it was the cutest, and I liked it. So I'm like, that will be my name, the Sleep Lady. So I'm a family therapist for 30 years, and when I had my oldest daughter, who is 28 at the time, the only thing they had what they call an America ferber, which is put the baby in the crib, leave the room, let them cry, and don't go back in. Or you could go back in and check on them in increments. And it was always unclear when to start, and I really was concerned that this wasn't what was supporting my child's attachment and emotional development. And I thought, wow, there's got to be a better way. I waited until I thought she was a little bit older, and it kind of went against the norm at the time and developed this, what's now called the Sleep Lady shuffle, a gentler method of sleep coaching that doesn't involve leaving your child to cry it out. And I got popular just by honestly helping children sleep through the night, and then they told their friends, who told their friends, and it just kind of took off from there.

Katie: I love that. And it seems like the best messages tend to spread organically like that. And I'm sure it was a life saver for many parents because, as you probably know better than anyone, when babies aren't sleeping, parents aren't sleeping, nobody's sleeping, and everybody is exhausted and a little bit stressed out all the time. I also love to hone in on something you just said. I love that you call it sleep coaching, not sleep training. But I would love to hear you explain the distinction and why you use that term.

Kim: There was something about training that makes you think of, like, breaking a spirit. And I really like the metaphor of coaching. So I like to use this metaphor with families. If I am a coach for a kid's soccer team and I'm on the sideline and I'm celebrating with them, I'm picking them up when they're down, I'm giving them constructive feedback. I'm giving them everything I can. But in the end, I can't go out on the field and make the goal for them. I might want to, but I can't. And I think that that's a metaphor often in parenting, and in particular in sleep coaching. So in my method, you stay and you offer physical and verbal reassurance, doing less and less as the baby or child incorporates the skill themselves so you can move away and they can do the work themselves and really learn that skill. And it empowers parents, too, which you're really being a coach to them, too.

Katie: I love that analogy because very pertinent to me at the moment, my oldest daughter is a pole vaulter and now is in high school. So she has to compete under the high school. And even though she's home schooled, she has to compete under the public high school, and they didn't have a pole vault coach. And so even though I am by no means a great pole vaulter, I have pole vaulted. And so I volunteered to coach her team. And I'm learning lots of lessons through coaching.

And I'm realizing, I don't know if you've seen the show Ted Lasso, but I'm here more to be to Ted Lasso these kids than to help them with the specifics of their pole vault. And there's a lot of life lessons that start through that coaching process. And it seems like that's probably also true, very much so with babies and with our own children, even to more of a degree. I would love for you to talk a little bit about what you've written, too, because I know you have a book geared towards sort of that age where parents start wanting their kids to sleep on their own, like the six months on. And that now you're also addressing the ages before that. So maybe walk us through the overview of your initial work in that six month and update and then what makes this book different.

Kim: So my first book, the Sleep late is good night, Sleep tight. That addresses six months to six years. It's been out for almost 19 years. Continue to sell well. It was one of the first books offering a gentle approach, and I had kind of an introductory section about newborns, just kind of setting the stage, but not how to sleep train a newborn. And then most of my work has been in the book, Six Months to Six year olds. I mean, I used to, in my private practice work with older kids, but in the book, I kept it to that. And then I was on my third edition and 2000 and maybe 2019. The third edition came out in 2020. And I pulled the newborn section out of the book. I had a little bit about bonding, but I really wanted families to get more and to get more gentle advice.

So I pulled that out and made room for this next book that comes out tomorrow on the 21 March. And that's strictly on babies zero to five months old. I've been disturbed about a couple of things, and the main one is that parents are hearing now, and it's causing them incredible anxiety and guilt that they need to and they use the word train, sleep train, their newborn. I've heard eight days old, four weeks old, six weeks old, eight weeks old, with always this kind of messaging that if you don't do it now, you're going to have a lifelong problems with your child of sleeping. And specifically, for whatever reason, the way to do this is only by crying it out, no other gentle methods.

And I just have parents literally in tears coming to my coaches and myself saying, is this true? I can't handle it. Or how can my baby go this long without a feeding and being shamed? And I just want to scream from a mountaintop that that's not necessary. And that I really spent a lot of time in this book on sort of two things.

One, is understanding what I call baby led sleep shaping and coaching is that we go by our child's development and what they're capable of and learning about their brain development and their physical development and cognitive development and their temperament. So often this is left out because, you know, as a mom, Katie, that I'm sure of your children, there are vast differences in their temperament, even though they have the same parents. I know that even in just my two girls, I see their differences. So that's so important, even affects when and how fast, as an example, you can sleep coach.

And then the final section that I really in each chapter, I really had to I don't want to say fight, but I kind of had to fight to keep it in the book with my publisher. Was in each section, each chapter. Each chapter I have a section on taking care of the parent because I think this is so lost in our fast paced world. And I do mean world. I don't even just mean the United States, because I have coaches all over the world, and I know that the parents are experiencing the same kind of pressure to get back, get back to work, get back to whatever life, and that we often, as the parent, come last. As soon as we have the baby or adopt and receive the baby, it becomes all about the baby and not us. And we really are intricately linked as a family. And our baby's well being is definitely affected by our well being.

Those are some of the big differences, besides the fact that I really break it down month by month. And what are things that you can do to set up a foundation, a good sleep shaping foundation, so that maybe, perhaps you don't have to sleep coach at all, or if you do, very little and then when the baby's ready so it goes more seamlessly and with less crying, which is what all our goals are, right?

Katie: Yeah. I love that you take the parents into account because it seems like there is very much a feedback loop, especially with newborns and the parents, and that they feed off our nervous system and we feed off of theirs. And if it goes in a positive direction, both people benefit. And if stress goes in a negative direction, both people feel that. And I love also your term, baby-led sleep because people have maybe heard this term in baby-led weaning and letting babies eat when they're ready. And I feel like you were the first I've ever heard apply that to sleep, which makes so much sense.

And I was so grateful to have your book, your first book, when I had my 1st, 116 years ago, because it wasn't the approach that my parents and grandparents knew about back then. It probably wasn't how I learned how to sleep. It was probably a much different method. But I, like many parents, wasn't comfortable just letting my baby cry all night. I would love to hear you break down those stages a little bit, maybe an idea of what to look for in some of those stages, because it seemed like somewhere between maybe like six and nine months with my kids, their sleep did change a little bit. And I started to notice, like, oh, they actually now sleep better

sometimes without me right next to them. Sometimes I disturb them or they're ready to sleep longer through the night. But maybe if you could walk us through some of those stages and what parents can look for.

Kim: Yeah, so often we just have to have realistic expectations of our babies and also ourselves, of course, too. And most parents don't know this, that when your baby is born, that internal clock, what's called the circadian rhythm that you and I have that's developed in other adults, is not developed in a baby until it just starts around three to four months and often isn't fully developed until six months. So that's probably where you're seeing that difference.

And so that internal clock tells us when to be awake and when to be asleep. It tells the body when to secrete melatonin that drowsy making hormone, and it's affected by darkness and social cues. i.e. a bedtime routine. And that is not set in the beginning, right. We have to model that to them in the beginning. I always say we have to be their external clock until their clock develops, right? And so that's probably why you saw that in your children. So one of the first things we can start to see in the second month, the end of the second month is we might see the one longer stretch of sleep at night. And when I say one longer stretch, like four, maybe 5 hours if we're lucky, but four is realistic. And then in the third, closer to the fourth month, something like that, we might say, oh, I noticed that the bedtime is starting to move a little bit earlier, sort of innately. Or I tend to notice my baby wakes up at 7:30 every morning and they seem to need a nap at 8:00 or 9a.m. every morning when you didn't see that before when they were younger.

And so those are those signs of, Ah, I see. This must be that internal clock developing so that we can kind of shape it. So baby-led doesn't mean we go only by the baby. Right. We have to kind of shape that with the baby because as an example, their internal clock is not developed. So we have to be that, so then we can sort of see more easily the patterns and when they're ready. So I often think that the easiest time if you're going to do any sleep coaching is between six and eight months.

Katie: Good to know. That's definitely what it intuitively felt like to me. And I'm also curious your take, because I always just kind of had this sense with the little teeny newborns that they lived inside my body for nine months and they didn't understand that we weren't separate beings because they existed inside my body. And so it seemed logical to me that it would take a while for them to be able to understand and have any kind of nervous system comfort with being alone at night. Does that also sort of line up in that same age range where they start to understand that and have more nervous system calm and safety without being in contact with parents all the time?

Kim: The middle brain takes a lot. It takes several years to develop and the brain actually isn't fully developed for, I think it's two years after a baby is born. So it probably takes longer than that. But when our babies are born, I think for me it was really easy to forget that, to your point, when they're in utero, they don't have to express a need, right? They don't know what it means to be like, oh, I'm hungry, how am I going to get rid of that feeling, right? They're just automatically fed, they're kept warm, all their needs are met, and then they come out into the world and imagine they don't understand what anything is. What is that? My parent drops a

pan in the other room and it scares me, but I don't know what that means. I don't know what all these lights and these faces and these sounds mean and I don't know how to get my needs met.

And so it's really a dyad right, between parent and child and children or our babies don't learn to differentiate their cries so that we can read them until maybe three or four months of age. So it is this it's like we're sort of taking like Baby Language 101 for a good three or four months before we can finally figure each other out. And so that starts to develop at the same time. Remember that they're in that primitive brain state. They can't even as an example, know in the beginning to, oh, this person is in my face and loud and overwhelming me. I need to turn my head away and close my eyes. They can't even do that in the beginning, right? They can't bring their hands to midline and learn to suck on their hands to suit them. These are all things that happen slowly. So that's why I always think it's important to create that calm environment for them because their body and brain and nervous system is so sort of raw and undeveloped in the beginning because we learn better from that calm state and saying whether it's sleep or communicating our needs. And so that sort of develops over time.

Katie: That makes sense. And I love that in this book you talk about the approach with just newborns because I think you're right. I've seen some of this advice of start sleep training them on day one and just let them cry and make them sleep when you want them to sleep. And that always felt very counterintuitive to me. But at the same time, I very much understand as a new mom how overwhelming it is to bring a baby home and how much change that brings to the whole household. So with your approach, what are some of the things parents can focus on in those first few months, like you say, to set them up for success without just leaving baby alone to cry from day one?

Kim: Yeah. So I put in my book what I call the ten baby-led, sleep shaping elements. And of course, there's creating a sleep friendly environment, right? I'm a big proponent of room darkening shades, white noise for sleep. I'm not saying 24/7 for sleep, soothing colors. Just having an area, even if you're room sharing or you're putting a co sleeper next to your bed, having some place that says and a short routine before this is where we slow down and go to sleep.

And then really pretty much right away, or at the very least by the end of the first month, I would start to create routines. Like, even if it's I bring you over here to change you, and I give you this little toy while I change your diaper, or I give you a little massage before I put you in your swaddle, I sing you a certain song, something that's very simple and repetitive so they start to connect and associate. That's what we do before we go to sleep. When they really start to get that around four months of age, like they connect an association with an activity, like going to bed.

Another rule I have is the 3pm rule. I call it going back to this primitive brain. So pretty much by somewhere between 3pm and 7pm., I would just calm down your environment. I know this might be hard, particularly if you have older kids. Sometimes it may mean putting the baby in a safe, whether it's a swing or some kind of bouncy seat in a quieter room, dimmer lights, even having a different routine for when the other kids come home. At that moment, maybe they're not right into the baby's face because usually by three to seven they're

pretty overwhelmed by their day. That's been a long day for them, even though it only feels like a quarter of the day. So that will help reduce fussiness and basically the bewitching hour, if you ever experience that in the early evening.

And then this one, I know goes against common advice, but I would wake a baby during the day so they don't miss a feeding. So that would be 3 hours. If they're sleeping more than 3 hours, I would wake them. Because you want to kind of give the message because remember, that internal clock is not developed. So we want to give the message like, no, we're going to have our feeding during the day. I know you don't know the difference between day and night yet, but this is going to be one way to help them. And then of course, at night have everything quiet, dim lit for the feedings.

And then another little important thing that I think we're so used to now having our babies covered, whether it's like a shield in the stroller or the car seat, but really, actually we want them to have some sunlight exposure. If you live in a cold place, just open the shade, have them near the window in the morning. In particular, this helps to set that clock, by the way, with daylight savings. It's also helpful for us too, just to help set up that clock for success and then some, by the way, these are not all things you're going to do right from the beginning, right? You're going to start to add them on.

But I do think if you work on these few that I just said in the first one and two months, that's how you can avoid day night confusion, which is really common, where your baby is taking these huge naps during the day and then they're up a million times at night and you're like, what's going on? That's when you'll say, oh, that's right, Kim said they don't have that internal clock. And so this is how you're going to kind of shape that schedule.

And so then the rest of the elements have to do with your baby's development and what they're ready for. And it sinks into that this sleep shaping element is ready to be focused on. Because I really want families just to have a couple, like one or two focuses per month. Not everything, because frankly, your baby is not ready for it anyway. So if you could just focus on avoiding day night confusion by doing some of those things we talked about, right, having that calm environment, creating those routines, waking them if they sleep more than 3 hours during the day so that we can start to help them know the difference between day and night.

And I would just add one other thing and that is and I know this is hard because we all do this as parents is I would encourage you to try not to compare your baby to other babies. I know it's hard, we all do it, but they're so different. The research shows huge variabilities in babies under six months of age. I mean, such a big variability that the sleep averages that they used to give now have like an eight hour difference range, right? So just because your neighbor's baby is taking three hour naps and yours is taking 30 minutes naps and they're two months old, I would just say, let it go. Day sleep is not developed for quite some time. Night sleep is developed first. Just do the best you can to get the sleep you can with them during the day and focus on making sure they're well fed too and calming the environment and that will really help.

Katie: Yeah. To your point, I feel like some of the best advice I learned about sleep as an adult actually came from watching my newborns because we now hear of some of these things. Even people like Andrew Huberman are popularizing, the importance of light during the day and food timing and all these things. And it turns out babies respond, I think, even more quickly to that because they are still developing that rhythm. But I noticed when I made a point to make sure I got sunlight with my baby during the day, especially that morning sunlight that I talk about a lot, it helped their sleep. It also helped my sleep.

Same thing with how you talked about the food timing, which we know that food temperature and light are big signals of circadian rhythm which they're still developing. So it seems like the more consistent we can be as parents with those, the more responsive they are, even more so than we are as adults, but that it's beneficial to the whole family if we can integrate those habits. I always give those tips for adults too. If you get morning sunlight, and ideally a few minutes of midday sunlight, those are big signals to your circadian rhythm, to your melatonin production if you keep your food during the day. And for adults, at least try to end by sunset so you have time to digest. Babies digest more quickly and need to eat more often. But for adults, that's always a great tip. And then same thing with temperature. That's why often a warm bath at night helps adult sleep. It helps babies sleep too. And it seems like that all lines up perfectly with your approach of developing a routine early.

Kim: Yeah, and that's perfect. That was great, Katie. Exactly. I 100% agree with you. I would even add another one then. I was just thinking of what you were saying, which is technology, so we all hear about this. To not have screen time for an hour or two before bedtime. I would definitely do that with your newborn. I would actually encourage you to even not be on your phone while you're caring for your baby. If you can wait, if you need to scroll or check some emails, do that when they're sleeping so that you are fully engaged with them too. And also because we know now that screen time tells the brain not to secrete melatonin, that drowsy making hormone. So there's also some great hopefully you have some of the filters on your phone and your iPad. I know that if you are a parent and you had Insomnia before and you're really struggling with it being a new parent, there's also smart light bulbs that are really great and also night lights that come in more like an amber color. That can help you too, because sleep deprivation puts you at higher risk for postpartum mood and anxiety disorder too.

Katie: That's great to know. I wish I had known this when I had my babies. But one thing that's been really helpful in our house, even the ages they are now, is understanding that bright light in nature comes from overhead. And the nighttime lights would be like ground level or eye level or below, like fires, sunset, etc. So one switch we made is I put broad spectrum bulbs in all the ceiling lights of our house and then put lamps in each room that were on just like end tables with red bulbs. And so at sunset, lightning in our house switches and I can feel within 30 minutes, everybody's nervous system calms down. It gets quieter in the house. And I wish I had known that with babies, but I'm grateful for it now. And if I had it to go over again, I would put that on my long list of things I wish I knew starting out.

Kim: Yes, that is a great I love that I had not heard about that before. It makes complete sense. I love it.

Katie: What about the concept of sleep regression? Because it seems like you hear of parents who have babies who do sleep really well, and then they maybe go through a phase where they stop sleeping as well. And it can be really frustrating to parents. Is that a normal developmental thing as well? And if so, are there any tips for when babies kind of go through phases of sleep like that?

Kim: So there's a lot of stress too, now about, like, babies in another regression. So I like to use the word. It comes from Dr. Brazilton. It's developmental milestone that he talks about in his book *Touch Points*. And the developmental milestones that negatively impact sleep the most are physical milestones. So when a baby is learning to roll, crawl, stand, and walk are the biggest ones. I'm not saying that sometimes baby sleeps aren't disrupted for other big milestones, but the research is pretty clear that it's around these physical milestones.

The rolling one, which used to be the average rolling, was three and four months. Apparently, this is starting to move later because our children are not spending enough time on the floor, which, by the way, a big proponent of tummy and floor time. You want your baby to learn to roll. It's really one of their first big self-soothing skills besides bringing their hands like this and to mouth, and then it's to roll. Sometimes those things happen around the same time. And so around this milestone also, this is really a big one. The sleep cycles change. And so around four months, again, it's always around. There's no like a definitive your baby's sleep cycles start to change. They wake more completely in between the cycle changes, and they sorry about that. And they have a harder time sometimes going to sleep because they are doing it from a more wake up state.

So this is what I have, I think, of milestones with parents. So I went to when my oldest one was going to middle school, and they got us all into the auditorium and tell us all about how life is going to change from elementary school to middle school. And the guidance counselor spoke and said that your children are about to go on an emotional roller coaster, and your job as a parent is not to get on the roller coaster with them. And I love that. I remember thinking, oh, okay, that's good. And I remember, of course, with the moods of kids that sometimes I found myself on the roller coaster and I was still on the roller coaster even after they got off the roller coaster. Right. They were onto something else. And I was still irritated or upset about whatever it was. That came on and I got better, of course. But I think it's that same idea.

I think when because our children, our babies go through phases, just when you think you've got it down, then something else happens, right? They go from three naps to two naps or they start walking or all of a sudden you have to safety proof your living room or gate your stairs or whatever it is. And I think that the more that we can stay steady as they go up and down, the easier it will be. So that if we happen to be like, oh well, we added another feeding that night and we don't know why, and then as long as we don't stay there for three weeks, right? Same for, oh, my child got an ear infection and it took me a couple of days or nights to figure it out. And in the meantime I started rocking them to sleep and then now they're done with their antibiotic. Then you might want to go back and do some gentle sleep coaching, get back on track. The longer we stay on the roller coaster, the harder it is to get off of it.

Katie: That's such a good point. And also a great practice and metaphor for I feel like all aspects of parenting with mine now having ages seven to 16, I realized early on if I can be the calm, if I can keep my nervous system

calm in whatever experience they're having, they get through it more easily and more quickly. And they at least have a calm sounding board. Whereas if I were to escalate, then now there's two people escalating and now the whole energy goes up a lot more quickly. And so that was the thing I tried to keep the focus on. I didn't learn it when my first few were little. It took me a while talking. Kids helped a lot with that regulation for me. But I think that's such valuable things to keep in mind and to practice even when they're little because that's going to apply through our whole parenting journey and be a valuable skill all the way through.

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I know this is a little bit of a controversial topic, but I would also love to make sure we touch on your thoughts on things like co sleeping or sharing a bed because I know that is helpful for a lot of parents. But I'm curious your take on it and if it's helpful or harmful for sleep long term.

Kim: No, I love talking about this. I am not against safe co-sleeping. I think what works for the family, works for the family. As long as it's safe and you're following those guidelines and you feel comfortable with it and everybody's in support of it in the family, then I'm great that I'm good for it.

I think where I have always a hard time is I guess I'm kind of middle of the road. I just don't think it's one size fits all. I don't think it means that if you don't like co-sleeping or you can't get a wink of sleep because every little squeak wakes you up or you're very sensitive yourself, then that's okay, you don't have to co-sleep. I don't feel like that's the only way to have a secure attachment with a child. Really secure attachment is formed honestly during the waking hours, mostly right in that dialogue, in that dyad and communication in our I'm expressing my needs. My needs are being met by my caretaker. That's really where that comes from.

So I don't think it has to come from co-sleeping. At the same time, I'm completely for it if it's done safely. I always tell families, because I've helped many, many co-sleeping families just improve their sleep. They want to continue to co-sleep, but they want to improve it. And so we usually focus whenever it's age appropriate or we decided as a team that we're going to do this, is we'd focus on learning to put yourself to sleep at bedtime independently. So even if it means, oh, my baby will go to sleep at their bedtime in their crib, and I teach them how to put themselves to sleep. And then when I come to bed or their first awakening or however you want to do it, I bring them into the bed with me, and we co sleep. At least they have that one skill. And then you can start to do that at naps because you're going to get to a point where you're not going to want to have a nap two times a day with your child or go to bed at 7pm kind of thing. And so then you've laid that groundwork so that when or if you want to end co sleeping, they still have that skill. And that's really what a child will be able to say, mommy, I want to sleep over there, or I want to have my own room. Because they feel comfortable and they have the skill.

Katie: That makes sense, and it's good to hear, because just like I feel like the baby was used to me being around when they were in utero, I also felt like I was used to the baby being around. And so I always did sleep better, and I felt like I developed almost like ninja superhuman skills of being able to protect the baby right next to me. Even if the dad rolled over, I could just put my arm up, and it was like my nervous system was completely aware of that baby being there, and I slept better knowing the baby was there up to that point. Ironically, that overlapped with that when they started getting restless during sleep is also when I started feeling comfortable with them sleeping on their own. And it seemed to be a pretty seamless transition once we were both at that point, which I think speaks to your approach a lot and was so helpful to me to understand that going in.

Kim: Yeah, well, you made me think of something that I thought was so fascinating when I was researching for this book, because we all hear about baby brain. Baby brain is real, and it's not just for the mother. It's all the primary caretakers they show in studies. Brains change and the brain changes in such a way that you have heightened senses. I was just thinking about that, Katie, when you were saying that about it's like you kind of sleep with one eye open, but somehow how did you know to put your arm up when your husband was rolling over? The brain does that on purpose. Human nature has done that so that we are more sensitive and more attuned to our babies to meet their needs. And so it makes it harder for us to multitask and do all the other things we, I guess, aren't supposed to do, instead focus on our babies. So I love how you called it a superhero skill.

Katie: Well, that makes sense. And hopefully it gives parents the ability to give themselves a little grace when multitasking feels really difficult in those first few months that it's developmentally appropriate for us as

parents, too, and we don't have to worry about it. It will eventually come back. I was glad to find that out that all those things do eventually normalize and come back and enjoy the present moment when they're that little because it goes so fast. Earlier on, you mentioned what you called the Sleep Lady Shuffle. And I would love for you to explain this, because what I love about your approach and that I was so glad I found early on was those small tips and that difference in helping them gain that skill of sleeping on their own. But it didn't feel like I was abandoning them, and hopefully they didn't feel like I was abandoning them. So can you walk us through the sleep lady shuffle?

Kim: Yeah. So let me just give you another sort of story or metaphor that helped me to come to this. I remember when I was in grad school and I wasn't a parent yet, and I had an internship, and somehow it was with little kids, and somehow there was this discussion or a moment with a bunch of kids where they were talking about time out and making the child sit in the chair. And I know that there are some famous people on TV who have it in the corner, but I remember thinking, what is the child learning from that? They're having a big feeling and they're just taught to go over there and sit down until the big feeling goes away and then they can rejoin. And it's sort of like being sent to your room when you were a teenager. I could never quite figure out what am I learning from this in terms of how do I manage my feelings?

And I remember thinking that about sleep training, which is what it was called, thinking, how is leading my child to figure it out, which they say that's how they'll learn self soothing. How are they going to learn that when there's nobody there to model it, show them and provide that support. Now, mind you, I do want to say if there's anybody's listening and you did ferber or cried out and it worked well and your child sleeping well, then I have no judgment against you.

I just want parents who tried it and it didn't work or who tried it and their child cried for hours. Because there are those kids to know that there is another option, right? So no judgment. Parenting is hard enough. We all got to figure out what works for ourselves, what works for our children, and what we can follow through with consistently. And then let's add in the mix your child's temperament too, right, because you don't want to try to put a square hole in a round peg. And some of these very sensitive kids need a gentler approach than ferber. So I just want to make sure everybody hears that.

So the Sleep Lady shuffle is basically everyone's going to say, have a soothing bedtime routine. Find your child's ideal bedtime, which I agree with all of those things that time where it's easiest for them to go to sleep and stay asleep. They're not over tired. Most of us put our kids to bed too late because we sort of wait until they're dead dog tired and then we've missed that window when the body starts to secrete all these alerting hormones to keep it awake. That's like the hardest time to do this. So we find the ideal time, we have our soothing routine, and then we place our baby in, let's say, their crib. And I also do this with children in their beds and the parent sits next to the bed or the parent sits next to the crib. And then you offer verbal and physical reassurance. So whether that's shushing, it's, okay? I love you. Nigh nigh. A pat on the chest, a rub of the head, whatever it is, nothing constant like letting them hold your hand to sleep. And you do less and less in the first three nights and then you slowly move away.

So you can always go to cribside to reassure, but you're doing less and less. And so eventually the child has incorporated the skill themselves with your reassurance and presence and then they really don't need you there. And they feel safe, secure. They know that you're there for them and they have it. And they get that positive association to going to sleep. I mean, so many clients said, oh my God, I thought my baby hated their crib. And now I get to the crib after their soothing routine and they dive in and then they're like, nigh nigh and they feel like it's a miracle. And it does feel like a miracle because it's really a beautiful thing.

Katie: Yes, that is that life changing moment when they start really, actually sleeping and everybody starts sleeping again. But I love so much that you brought up that point of really evaluating what are they actually learning from this, because I think this is another thing that ripples into all aspects of parenting. And I realized when mine were young that my parents were awesome parents, but they had at times put me in time out. And what I had internalized not what they meant for me to, but what I had internalized was that big emotions were not okay. And as an adult, even I realized I had sort of a cocooning response where if I was upset about something, I would isolate, which can serve a purpose sometimes. But I learned through therapy, too, that often that it can be counterproductive when we're actually trying to work through something and we're not willing to seek out support.

And so I love that that's such a valuable question at all times of parenting, is like, what are they really learning from this? What do I want them to learn from this? And then, what's the best way to help them learn that? Because I think helps shift to a curious lens of how we're approaching things where we might have an open mind and be able to try new approaches, like, in your case, like the gentler methods that can work. I would argue just as well or better, but hopefully also reinforce those things that we do want to make sure they're learning and that attachment and the connection that will serve through so many aspects of parenting.

Kim: Definitely. I really like to use, by the way, for parents who are like, well, what else should we use if we don't use time out during the day? So let's say you have a child, like my younger one, very alert and spirited, and she would fling herself down on the ground and bang her head on the floor, which I was like, Why in the world would you do that? That looks like it hurts. And then you have to give them a lull, not walk away. That's where the difference is. You have that lull where, oh, if I go and pick them up, I'm not going to get hurt or kicked. And you pick your child up facing out so again, they don't hurt you, hit you. And then I would go to a quiet place in my living room. I had this particular stairway that was kind of dimmer lit and less stimulating. And you'd sit there, you put them on your lap, and you do like a hug like this around their body, so around both of their arms, like that. And then you move forward and back. And then you start to inhale and exhale. So it's calming you down too, because we need that. When our kids have a tantrum and you're not talking, maybe you're just saying, it's okay. And you're just breathing until you feel their body release.

And so when they're young and not super verbal, then afterwards you just give them a kiss, get down and distract them. Let's go, whatever it is, go on to the next thing. Let's go look out the window, see if we can find a red bird or whatever it is. And when they're older and they have language, not right away, but you can talk to them maybe a few minutes later, like, wow, you were really angry when Mommy said, no cookie before dinner, and you stamped your feet on the ground and you threw something or whatever it is. And you know that in our house we have a rule that we don't have cookies before dinner. And what do you think you could

do next time you feel angry? Maybe we could..... And then you teach them, go scream in a pillow, stop my feet, or help them to figure out, like, A) it's okay that I had that big feeling, and B), Mommy or parent helped me to calm down and sort of re-regulate honestly and not okay.

I remember reading Mary Kirchenka's book on the spirited child, and my younger one, who was alert, I called her, but not really spirited in the way that she talked about it. And she would get upset and go up to her room and slam the door. She's like four or maybe six in that ray of five, something like this. And I thought, okay, she wants to have her space. And then I read her book, and it talked about these sort of more quiet, spirited kids. And I said, I noticed that when you get really upset, you go up in your room and you slam your door. And I'm wondering, do you want to be alone or would you like Mommy to come in and maybe give you a hug? And she said that she would like to not be alone, but she'd know what to do and that it would help if I came in and helped her. And I thought, wow, like, so glad I asked. And also shows you how you have to parent each of your children differently. My older one was not at all like that. She would have come to me and said that she needed help.

Katie: It's so true. I feel like when I have learned aspects of parenting one of my children, I have learned only aspects of parenting that particular child. And they are so unique and individual. But I think that lesson you just talked about, of helping them to understand the separation between emotion and action and the emotions are always okay and they're going to flow through us, and that's fine. And we don't have to fight them and we still have control over what we do with those emotions and our behaviors. And whether we hit our siblings or not, that is a valuable lesson that we'll carry all throughout adulthood as well. And I feel like you just have tips like this peppered in through everything that you write in all of your work. So for people listening, I'm sure there are parents with kids of all varying ages, including newborns. Can you just walk us through all of the resources you have so that parents are aware and can find those when they hit those particular stages?

Kim: Yes. So if you go to sleeplady.com, I have thousands of blog articles. I have lots of free guides on where to get started with sleep coaching, on naps, on transitioning from crib to bed. I also have two courses for sleep, and now I'll have a third one for these newborn. And then I also have a Gentle Potty coaching course and guide, too, for those of you maneuvering into potty training. And then, let's see, my goodness, I have my directory of fabulous gentle sleep coaches and gentle potty coaches that you can set up a call with and decide if you want to work with them individually. And then, of course, I have my two books and a workbook on children with special needs. My first book, the Sleep Lady's Good Night, Sleep on Amazon, Barnes and Noble and Book Depository. And then my new book, Coming Out on Newborns, will be available tomorrow.

Katie: And speaking of books, a couple of questions I love to ask at the end of interviews. The first being if there is a book or number of books that have profoundly impacted you personally and if so, what they are and why.

Kim: I had to think a lot about that because it's hard to pick one book. And I actually talked about this with my daughters. And I was thinking it's almost like I have like a book for each decade, right, of depending on where

you are in life. But instead of sharing my whole list on the decade, I thought, well, wow, what's the theme in those books? And I found that they were about feminine empowerment. And I don't mean like feminism necessarily, but just really about embracing and learning and loving my femininity as a partner, as a girlfriend, as a mother, as a mother of daughters. And the different stories and ways that has been told through books has really touched my soul as I've entered into different parts of being a woman.

Katie: That's beautiful. And lastly, any parting advice for the listeners today that could be related to babies in sleep or unrelated life advice?

Kim: You've probably heard me say this in this time, I think it's honestly to be kind and gentle to yourself and to try to let go of judgment of yourself and of your child and comparison and know that. And I know this is sort of cliché, but most of us really are just doing the best we can with what we have. And if we can just love ourselves through that, I think every day would be a little bit easier.

Katie: Yes. Such a life lesson, and I think it ties in so perfectly to so many of the things you have shared today. Thank you so much for your time and being here, for your work that has benefited me personally and I know many thousands of people around the world. Thank you so much.

Kim: Thank you, Katie, for having me.

Katie: And thanks, as always, to all of you for listening and sharing your most valuable resources, your time, your energy and your attention with us today. We're both so grateful that you did, and I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of The Wellness Mama Podcast.

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