

Safe Sleep Policy and Procedure

Policy Statement

At nippers Nursery Ltd, we recognise that sleep and rest are essential for babies'* and young children's wellbeing, development and emotional regulation. We aim to provide sleep opportunities that are safe, responsive to children's individual needs and consistent with recognised safer sleep guidance.

Our setting offers outdoor naps as part of our daily provision, where appropriate and safe to do so. Outdoor sleep is incorporated as part of the nursery's continuous provision, ensuring children have access to calm and restful environments both indoors and outdoors.

This practice is underpinned by risk assessment, direct supervision and adherence to safer sleep recommendations from the Lullaby Trust.

Outdoor sleep will only take place when all safety requirements are met and when it supports the comfort and wellbeing of the child.

*For the purposes of this policy, the term "babies" refers to children under two years of age unless further clarification is given

Rationale

Importance of sleep for early development

Sleep plays a critical role in early childhood development. Adequate sleep supports:

- brain development
- emotional regulation
- memory consolidation
- physical growth

Children in early years settings often require multiple opportunities to rest and sleep throughout the day to maintain wellbeing and engagement in learning.

Benefits of fresh air and outdoor environments

Outdoor environments support children's health and wellbeing in a variety of ways. Time spent outdoors is associated with:

- exposure to natural light
- improved respiratory health
- sensory experiences
- opportunities for calm and regulation

Access to fresh air and natural environments is recognised as an important component of high-quality early years provision.

Outdoor sleeping is a well-established practice in several European countries, particularly within Nordic early childhood education settings.

Research examining infant sleep practices has explored the effects of outdoor sleep. A Finnish observational study found that infants slept for longer durations when sleeping outdoors compared with indoor sleep when appropriately dressed and supervised.

When carried out appropriately it can support settled naps and exposure to fresh air, both of which may benefit children's wellbeing.

Safety and safer sleep guidance

The nursery follows safer sleep guidance from the Lullaby Trust to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

This guidance emphasises that babies (children under two years) should:

- sleep on their backs
- sleep in a firm, flat sleep space
- be kept at a comfortable temperature
- sleep in a clear space without loose items
- be closely supervised during sleep

These principles apply to all sleep environments, including both indoor and outdoor sleeps.

Suitable Sleep Equipment

Children will only sleep in equipment that is appropriate for their age, stage of development and safety requirements.

All sleep equipment used by the nursery must provide a firm, stable and well-ventilated sleep surface and support safe sleep practices.

Babies 12 months and under

A cot, carry cot, moses basket or travel cot that fully meets British Safety Standards and is used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions is the safest place for a baby aged 12 months and under to sleep in.

Babies 13 month to two years.

Children under two years will sleep in one of the following approved sleep spaces:

- Cots
- Sleep pods fitted with waterproof, firm mattresses
- Purpose-made children's camp beds
- Flat bassinets or fully lie-flat prams

Babies under one year of age will sleep in a cot or age appropriate lay-flat pram or bassinet

These sleep spaces are selected because they provide:

- a flat and firm sleeping surface
- appropriate air circulation
- a stable and secure sleep environment

Mattresses used within cots, sleep pods and camp beds must:

- be firm and well-fitting
- be covered with waterproof protective covers
- be kept clean and hygienic
- fit the sleep equipment properly with no gaps

Where bassinets or prams are used, they must:

- allow the child to lie completely flat
- provide a firm sleep surface
- be stable and secure
- be positioned in a safe and supervised location

Pram seats that do not recline fully flat are not used for babies.

Bedding is kept minimal and appropriate for the child's age and temperature conditions.

Toddlers and older children (over two years of age)

Older toddlers and children may sleep in:

- children's camp beds
- sleep pods
- reclining strollers where appropriate

By this stage children have developed stronger head and neck control and are able to reposition themselves independently during sleep.

Sleep equipment is always used in a way that ensures children remain comfortable, supported and appropriately supervised.

Further Considerations

Consideration will always be given when children and babies have an additional need or were born prematurely resulting in smaller physical size that may require the child to continue to sleep with the guidance for safe sleep for babies as opposed to the guidance for toddlers and older children.

Weather and Temperature Guidance for Outdoor Sleep

Outdoor sleep will only take place when environmental conditions are suitable and safe for children.

Staff must assess weather conditions before placing a child to sleep outdoors and continue to monitor conditions throughout the sleep period.

Cold weather

Children may sleep outdoors if appropriately dressed and comfortable. Additional layers may be used, but babies must not wear hats during sleep in line with guidance from the Lullaby Trust. If a baby falls asleep whilst out on a walk in a pushchair, they must be transferred to a lay flat position and hats/hoods removed.

Warm weather

Outdoor sleep spaces must be positioned in full shade. Clothing layers should be reduced to prevent overheating.

Windy conditions

Outdoor sleep should only take place if sleep spaces can be positioned in sheltered locations.

Rain

Outdoor sleep may continue if children remain dry and well sheltered. Prams must not be covered with blankets or materials that restrict airflow.

Extreme weather

Outdoor sleep will not take place during extreme temperatures, severe wind or unsafe conditions. Indoor sleep spaces will be used instead.

Sleep Monitoring and Supervision

Children sleeping outdoors must always be directly supervised.

This means:

- a member of staff is physically present in the outdoor area
- children remain within sight and hearing of staff
- staff conduct regular sleep checks at least every 10 minutes

Sleep checks include observing:

- breathing
- sleep position
- body temperature and comfort
- signs of distress or discomfort
- ensuring the child's face remains uncovered

If a child shows signs of discomfort, overheating or distress, staff must respond immediately and adjust the sleep environment as required.

Legislative and Guidance Framework

This policy has been developed in line with the following statutory guidance and best practice recommendations:

- Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage – which requires providers to ensure children are kept safe and that their health and wellbeing needs are met.

- Lullaby Trust – safer sleep guidance to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

The nursery recognises that the Early Years Foundation Stage places a duty on providers to:

- ensure children are adequately supervised
- promote children's health and wellbeing
- provide environments that are safe and suitable for children

Sleep provision, including outdoor sleep, is therefore carefully managed to ensure it meets both children's developmental needs and safeguarding requirements.

Implementation and Monitoring

The nursery manager and leadership team are responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented consistently across the setting.

This includes:

- ensuring staff understand and follow safer sleep guidance
- monitoring sleep environments and supervision practices
- reviewing risk assessments relating to outdoor sleep
- ensuring staff receive appropriate training.

Sleep arrangements and outdoor sleeping practices are regularly reviewed to ensure they continue to reflect current guidance, research and the needs of the children attending the nursery.

References

- Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage
- Lullaby Trust – Safer Sleep Guidance
- Tourula, M. et al. (2010). *Infants sleeping outdoors: longer sleep duration compared with indoor naps.*
- McDowell, C. et al. (2023). *Infant outdoor practices and environmental exposure in early life.*
- NHS guidance on infant sleep environments.

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