

## Co-sleeping

In an [online speech to the National Children and Adults Services conference](#) Ofsted's chief inspector, Amanda Spielman, highlighted growing concern about preventable unexpected infant deaths, citing cases of babies being endangered by not being put down to sleep safely, instead sharing a bed or sofa with a parent or other carer who has been drinking.

Domestic alcohol consumption has been noted as an increasingly common factor in incidences of children being neglected or harmed. In July, the [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel](#) published their second national review of sudden unexpected death in infancy in families where the children are considered at risk of significant harm.

The [Out of Routine report](#) highlights that the sudden and unexpected death of an infant is one of the most devastating tragedies that could happen to any family. In spite of substantial reductions in the incidence of sudden unexpected death in infancy in the 1990s, at least 300 infants die suddenly and unexpectedly each year in England and Wales.

The safest place for a baby to sleep is on their back, in their own cot, in a room with their parents. It is never safe for a baby to share a bed or a sofa with anyone who has drunk alcohol or used drugs.

[Co-sleeping with your baby: advice from The Lullaby Trust - The Lullaby Trust](#)

[Co-sleeping or bed sharing with your baby: risks and benefits | NCT](#)

[Reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome \(SIDS\) - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

[The Triple Risk Model | Red Nose Australia](#)



## The impact of alcohol consumption on parenting

Given the prevalence and acceptance of alcohol use in society we risk normalising periodic excessive drinking and, in so doing, failing to recognise the serious consequences that non-dependent alcohol consumption can have on parenting capacity, potentially with catastrophic consequences. Drinking too much alcohol may not only reduce a parent's capacity to appropriately respond to children's needs, but also make the adult who has consumed alcohol an active danger to the child.

This means that children are being placed in danger, and even losing their lives, because adults – who, in many cases, do not consider themselves excessive drinkers - are not exercising normal levels of care and attention while drinking or recovering from the after-effects of over-indulgence in alcohol.

## 'Who's in Charge?'

The Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, working in partnership with the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership, has developed the *Who's in Charge?* campaign. The key message is about the need to identify a nominated adult, who is not drinking, to take responsibility for looking after children who may be present when parents and carers are consuming alcohol.

There are a series of videos and posters available to promote this messaging. These resources are located at: <https://www.bhamcommunity.nhs.uk/whos-in-charge/>

Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust grants permission for free and appropriate use of the resources to support the objectives of the *Who's in Charge?* campaign. For all enquiries about appropriate permissible use of any of the above materials, please contact the BCHFT communications team by [email](mailto:) or phone - 0121 466 7281

## What can I do?

### If you are a strategic lead:

- Identify those operational pathways within your service area or organisation where opportunities for asking parents and carers about their alcohol consumption might be embedded
- Consider whether there is a need to develop practice guidance for your staff and, if so, develop a strategy for embedding the practice guidance across your operational processes and for quality assuring the impact on frontline practice
- Identify mechanisms for promoting the '*Who's in Charge?*' campaign messages across your organisation

### If you manage staff:

- Offer regular, good quality reflective supervision which provides both support and challenge to staff in asking routine questions of the families they work with around alcohol consumption and the risks associated with alcohol on parenting capacity
- Ensure that staff are aware of the guidance for safe sleeping and hold discussions within teams about how this should be promoted in their direct work with families
- Identify how the '*Who's in Charge?*' resources can be used to support work with your families
- Circulate this learning briefing and ask staff to come prepared to talk in supervision about how it relates to their own practice

### If you are a frontline practitioner:

- Consider those opportunities within your own day to day practice where you could ask more questions or do more active checking out in your interactions with families about their alcohol use
- Identify those families where it would be appropriate to reinforce safe sleeping guidance for babies
- Consider how the '*Who's in Charge?*' resources can be used in your work with families to help them to think about how they keep children safe when adults are drinking alcohol

