

FIRST PERSON RAISING KIDS

Here's What Happened When My 4-Year-Old Started Co-Sleeping

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POSTED ON
October 5, 2016 (October 5, 2016)



When my first daughter was born, I didn't have a concrete plan for sleeping arrangements. As the first weeks turned into the first month, however, it became very clear that co-sleeping was not working out.

Instead of getting more sleep, I was exhausted by all-night nursing sessions. I couldn't find a comfortable position when the baby was in the bed, and when she slept in a bassinet next to our bed I couldn't block out the constant snorting and gurgling of a newborn.

I missed reading in bed at night, which felt impossible with a light-sleeping infant by my side. She woke when my husband sneezed, or when I fluffed my pillow. I longed to go to bed like a normal person, instead of sneaking in like a thief with the lights off, trying not to make a sound.

So out she went, banished to her own bedroom, but this didn't necessarily result in more sleep.

The first year was the hardest, when I'd drag myself out of bed and down the hall multiple times during the night for feedings. When I returned to my own bed, though, I was always grateful for the respite. I needed those brief hours away from my kid, with a wall and door separating us. It was important for my sanity, for my marriage, and, I thought, for her independence.

As years passed and my baby became a toddler and then a preschooler, I smugly patted myself on the back for my superior parenting skills. Those poor women trying to night-wean a two-year-old who was still in their bed! Those poor couples who never had their bedroom to themselves! I knew one thing for sure: co-sleeping was definitely not for me.

Of course I was foolish to think these things and tempt parenting karma. Of course I made a huge rookie mistake by swearing I'd *never* do something. Now I know better. In this tricky game of getting our kids to sleep, never say never to anything.

My darling daughter, who slept in her own room for four and a half years, has now been sleeping at the foot of my bed for an entire year. Do I mind? Yeah, sometimes. But mostly I am so thankful for every minute of sleep I get, that I've ceased caring about the sleeping arrangements in our house. If sleeping

outside in a tent every night meant my kids would grant me a little more sleep, I'd pitch that tent.

We live in a small two-bedroom house. There are two adults, and now, two kids. Obviously the plan was for the girls to share a room. It's hard to explain why this hasn't worked for us, when so many other families I know have kids who share a room. We've come up with a million plans for making it work, but none of them stick.

The girls fall asleep at different times in different ways. Trying to put one to sleep keeps the other one up. The youngest often wakes up very, very early. The oldest often has nightmares. The combination of these things means that when we try to keep them in the same room, no one sleeps.

So the youngest sleeps alone in the kids' room, where she sleeps best, and my now five-and-a-half-year-old sleeps in our room. When we thought it was very temporary, she slept in our bed. Then she slept on the floor. Now, she's a seemingly permanent roommate with her own bed and books and stuffed animals moved in.

Do people judge me when they come to my house and see a child's bed next to ours? Probably. For all I know, friends think of me as the mom who can't get her kid out of her room. I certainly don't blame them. Sometimes I judge myself for it. Sometimes, I'm embarrassed by it.

But mostly, I don't care what people think. Both of our girls are sleeping through the night right now, and there's no way I'm going to mess with that. Some nights, I even enjoy having her there, snoring softly across the room. It's cozy, and sweet.

Clearly, my daughter can't sleep with us forever. But as a parent I've learned over and over again that nothing is forever. What works one week doesn't work the next. Phases you swear will never end, suddenly do. Kids grow up and move out. So I'm done trying to figure out whether or not I'm a co-

sleeping mom. Sometimes I am. Sometimes I'm not. Mostly, I'm just a mom who wants to get some sleep.

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Jennifer Meier writes about cooking and parenting. She muses about both on her blog, Mama Tonic. <http://www.mamatonicblog.com>.







