



Promoting safer sleep for infants: BSW Sudden unexplained death in infancy (SUDI) prevention guidance and pathway

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Introduction

This guide supports **all** staff, including those working with adults who are parents, to deliver safer sleep messages or advice, especially for those staff working with families and parents at greater risk and in out-of-routine situations.

Used alongside the [Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy \(SUDI\) Policy – BSW, October 2024 - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#) this guide aims to:

- Define SIDS / SUDI / 'out to routine incidents'
- Highlight risk factors SIDS & SUDI including examples of situational risk and 'out-of-routine' factors for SIDS & SUDI;
- provide support with safer sleep conversations via an action card (see slide 4)
- provide clarity and consistency in safer sleep messaging;
- raise awareness of opportunities for delivering safe sleep messages to mothers, their partners and other carers;
- raise awareness of current safe sleep advice and resources available.



Definitions

Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS):

- The sudden death of an infant less than one year old that apparently occurs during normal sleep, which remains unexplained after a thorough investigation, including a complete autopsy, review of the circumstances of death and the clinical history (Krous et al., 2004) (1).

Sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI):

- An unexpected death may be defined as the death of a child that was not anticipated as a significant possibility 24 hours before the death, or where there was a similarly unexpected collapse leading to or precipitating the events that led to the death (Fleming et al., 2000) (2).
- SUDI refers to all unexpected deaths up to one year of age at the point of presentation.

Out-of-routine incidents:

- Unexpected changes in family circumstances immediately before SUDI, in which an infant is placed in an unsafe sleep environment. These situations occur across the full continuum of risk. In high-risk families they may be associated with situations where there is escalating safeguarding risk.

Taken from Out of Routine: A Review of Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI) in families where the children are considered at risk of significant harm (DfE 2020)

(1) Krous HF, Beckwith JB, Byard RW, Rognum TO, Bajanowski T, Corey T, Cutz E, Hanzlick R, Keens TG, Mitchell EA (2004). Sudden infant death syndrome and unclassified sudden infant deaths: a definitional and diagnostic approach. *Pediatrics*. 2004 Jul;114(1):234-8. doi: 10.1542/peds.114.1.234. PMID: 15231934. (2) Fleming, PJ, Blair, PSP, Bacon, C & Berry, PJ (2000), *Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy. The CESDI SUDI Studies 1993-1996*. The Stationary Office, London.

What increases risk of SIDS and SUDI?

Key Risk Factors:

- **Unsafe sleeping practices** (unsafe position and environment) see [safer sleep messaging](#).
- **Smoking** during pregnancy or after the baby is born, including smoking by other people present in the house
- **Alcohol and drugs** (during pregnancy and co-sleeping)
- Infants born **prematurely** or with a **low birthweight** (including twins)
- Infants that have spent time on a **neo-natal unit**
- Infants born to **younger mothers** (under 20 years)
- SIDS slightly more common in **boys**
- Lack of **partner support**
- Higher **deprivation**
- Higher **parity** (number of births)

Learn more about
[Vulnerability and protective factors in pregnancy and early parenthood](#)



Examples of situational risk or 'out-of-routine sleeping' factors?

- Temporary and emergency housing (Local Authorities must ensure space for, and access to a cot for all babies under 2)
- Altered sleeping arrangements (holidays, family occasions, staying with relatives, illness, fleeing domestic abuse)
- Deprivation and poverty indicators , overcrowding
- Evidence of neglect, domestic abuse and parental criminality

Other factors:

- Most deaths happen during the first 6 months of a baby's life.
- SIDS usually occurs when a baby is asleep, although it can occasionally happen while they are awake.

SUDI PREVENTION ACTION CARD

Support parents to apply safer sleeping practice for their babies, particularly where situational risk or 'out of routine sleeping' may be a factor.

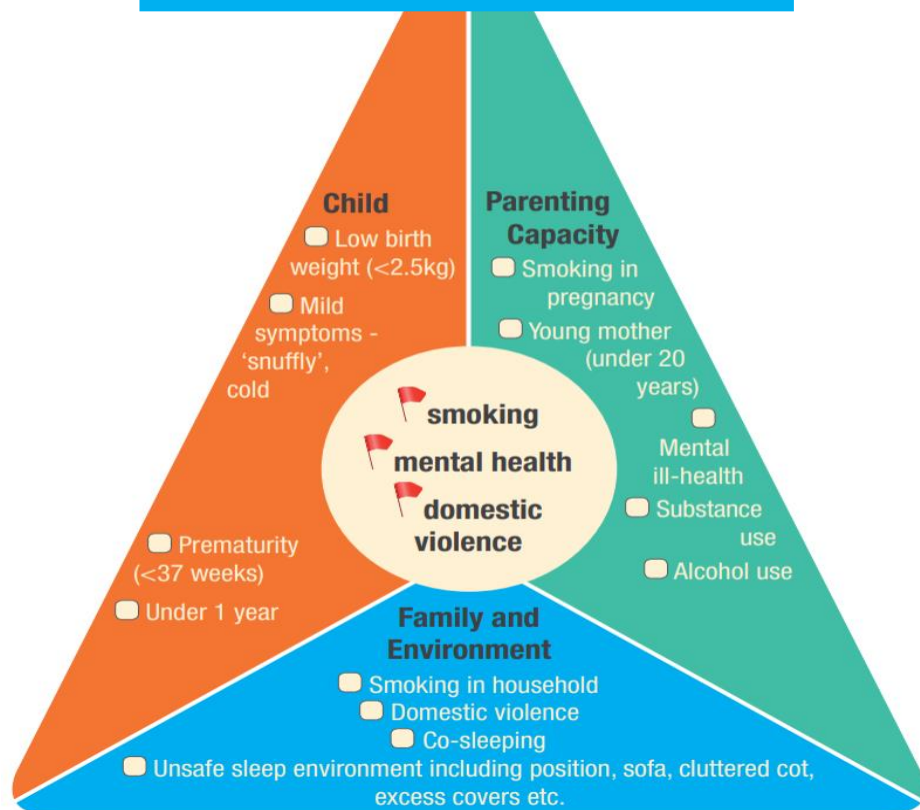
Universal need - for all families:

- **Ask** about the infant sleep plan
- **Assess** the level of risk
- **Advise** about benefits / risks and safe sleep plan

Is there additional need?

Are the safe sleep messages landing?

Assess the level of risk: see risk factors below increasing risk:



ASK:

- Discuss with family how the sleep situation is going in a compassionate, non-judgemental way.
- Ask where the baby woke up/where sleeping at night and day.
- Discuss who is involved with care of the baby.
- Consider the sleep environment – where is baby sleeping at night and day?

REFLECT:

- Are the family following safer sleep advice?
- Are there any risk factors – including out-of-routine and situational risk factors
- How are they coping? Do they need any further support?
- Every sleep needs to be a safe sleep, does every carer, including partners and grandparents, understand and follow safer sleep advice?

CHECK:

- Has the safer sleep advice been understood/absorbed?

If not...

- Use your professional curiosity to explore what might be preventing the family from following the advice - this could be a range of things (use open questions).
- Ensure a trusted, honest and open two-way conversation
- Ensure that safer sleep information from the Lullaby Trust is given out in the parent's first language/ a format they can understand.
- Make onward referrals as appropriate.
- Try to explore why they haven't engaged before and follow up any referral you make.

[How to reduce the risk of SIDS for your baby - The Lullaby Trust](#)

[Lullaby Trust publications - The Lullaby Trust](#)

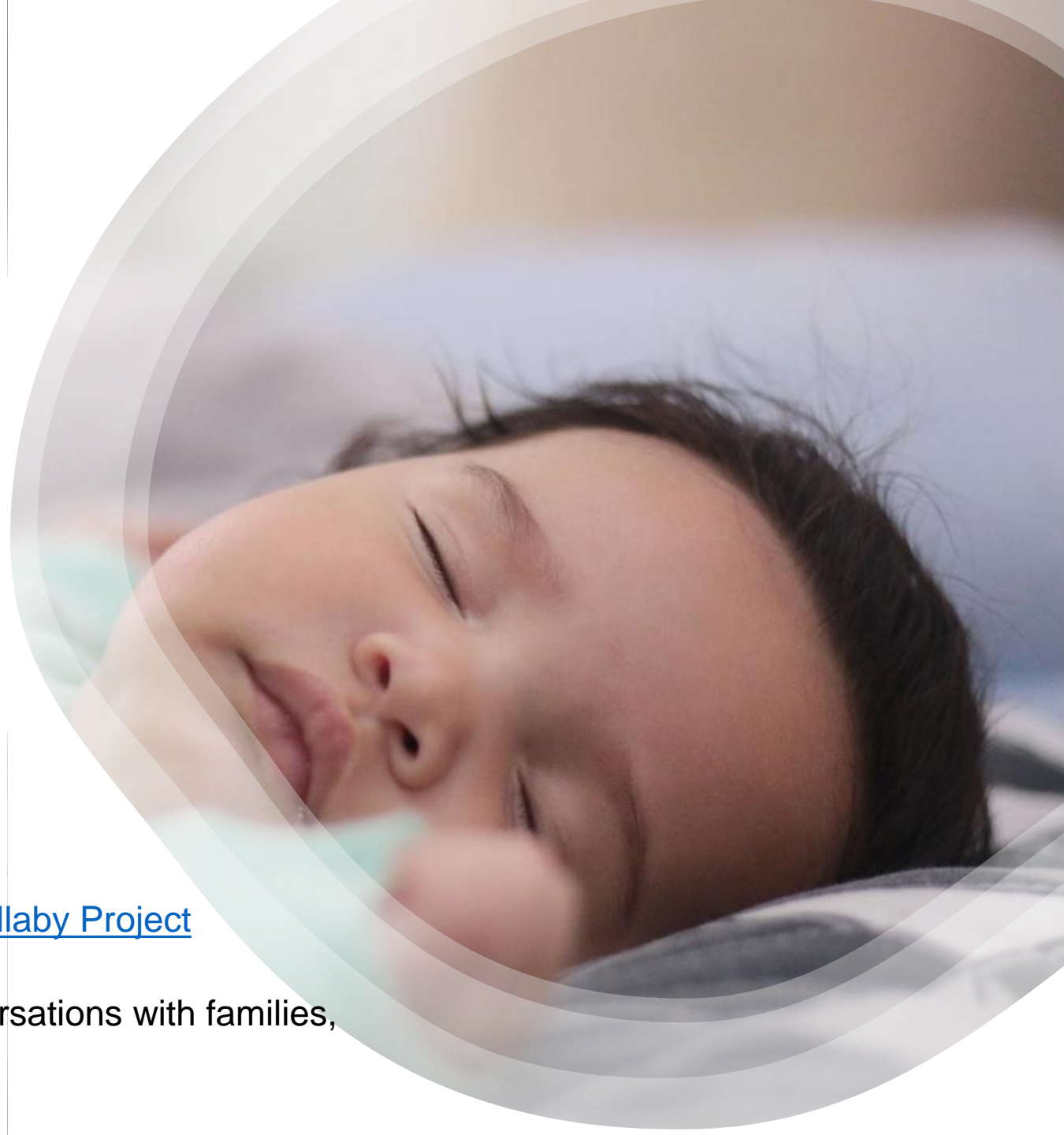
Remember: Every contact counts, it is every professional's responsibility to promote safer sleep and take action if required

Safer Sleep in Infancy Messages

The following links from The Lullaby Trust include safety messages on:

- [Safer sleep at home](#)
- [Sleeping away from home/out of routine situations](#)
- [Bed sharing / co-sleeping safely](#)
- [Safer sleeping for twins](#)
- [Slings and swaddling](#)
- [Second-hand mattresses/cots](#)
- [Dummies](#)
- [Baby boxes](#)
- [Car seats](#)
- [Premature and low birth weight babies](#)
- [Safer sleep messages for Dads](#)
- [Safer sleep messages for younger parents – Little Lullaby Project](#)

For guidance around having effective safer sleep conversations with families, see section 16 of the **BSW SUDI Prevention Policy**



Other protective factors

Immunisations:

Immunisations are associated with a halving of the risk of SIDS* and as such, parents and carers should be advised to ensure their infant receives all scheduled vaccinations.

See more information:

- The Lullaby Trust website www.lullabytrust.org.uk/safer-sleep-advice/vaccinations-and-sids/
- NHS immunisation schedule: www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/nhs-vaccinations-and-when-to-have-them/

Breastfeeding and SIDS: Even breastfeeding for a short time can be protective for an infant. Both partial and exclusive breastfeeding have been shown to be associated with a lower SIDS rate, but exclusive breastfeeding was associated with the lowest risk. SIDS risk is halved in infants who are breastfed for at least 2 months.

More information about [Vulnerability and protective factors in pregnancy and early parenthood](#).



Image courtesy of The Lullaby Trust

* <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0264410X07002800>

Healthy/Safer Sleep Messaging Timeline: when with safer sleep messages are given and who by

Antenatal

Universal

Maternity
Health visiting

Targeted

Family Nurse Partnership
Children's Social Care
Family Hubs
Pregnancy & parenting groups



At birth

Universal

Maternity
Health visiting

Targeted

NICU
Children's Social Care
Family Nurse Partnership



Postnatal

Universal

Maternity
Health Visiting
GP/Practice Nurse
Parenting groups

Targeted

Family Nurse Partnership
Family Hubs
Children's Social Care
Other Early Help Services

Additional services throughout pre-conception and perinatal period

Targeted

Stop-smoking services
Domestic abuse services
Drugs and alcohol services
Other Early Help Services



Other **important opportunities** to promote safer sleep:

- Hospital admissions
- At times when there are situational risks and out-of-routine circumstances that may increase the risk of SUDI and may mean that families find it difficult or impossible to engage with standard safer sleep messages.
- Conversations around out of routine events. E.g. holidays, staying with other family members, etc.
- Lullaby Trust Safer Sleep Week in March
- Via Facebook second-hand selling sites/Mumsnet, etc.

* Please report safeguarding concerns through your local pathway and call 999 if the infant is at risk of immediate harm.

Further resources to support staff learning:

The Lullaby Trust:

- Safer Sleep for Babies: www.lullabytrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Safer-sleep-for-babies-a-guide-for-parents-web.pdf
- Easy read information and community languages: www.lullabytrust.org.uk/professionals/publications/ you will need to scroll down towards the bottom of the page.
- Text free animations: www.lullabytrust.org.uk/professionals/video-resources/
- Safer Sleep Product Guide: www.lullabytrust.org.uk/product/safer-sleep-product-checklist/
- Safer Sleep for Emergency Situations: www.lullabytrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Safer-sleep-for-emergency-situations.pdf
- Safer Sleep training presentations: www.lullabytrust.org.uk/safer-sleep-advice/safer-sleep-for-babies-online-presentations/
- Safer Sleep Week social media resource pack: www.lullabytrust.org.uk/about-us/safer-sleep-week/
- Resources by young parents, for young parents: <https://littlelullaby.org.uk/>
- The Lullaby Trust QR Code:



- Baby sleep planner: <https://babysleepresearch.co.uk/baby-sleep-planner/> (*in development*)
- Baby Buddy App: www.bestbeginnings.org.uk/Pages/Category/commission-baby-buddy-app-services
- Action for Children: [Where should my baby sleep? - Support for Parents from Action For Children](#)
- Sleep – BASIS. Information on Safer Sleep: www.basisonline.org.uk/sleep-health-safety/
- NHS Guidance on SIDS: www.nhs.uk/conditions/sudden-infant-death-syndrome-sids/
- The Sleep Charity tips on babies and sleep: <https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/information-support/children/babies-sleep/>
- UNICEF: Caring for your baby at night and when sleeping: www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/sleep-and-night-time-resources/caring-for-your-baby-at-night/
- [Arden's neonatal baby check template](#)
- The Dad Pad: essential guide for new dads, developed with the NHS. <https://thedadpad.co.uk/>
- [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities - Chapter 17: Suitability of accommodation - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) – Section 17.12 and 17.13
- [BSW Maternity Voices Partnership Infant Feeding Padlet](#)
- [Real baby milk guide](#)

