



**Losing sleep:** Lucy Wolfe was keen to help Joe with Isabel

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**HIS first child, Max, now 22, would sleep anywhere, falling asleep immediately when he was put down. This left Joe McNamee entirely ill-prepared for his second son, Hector, aged four. He was impossible to put to sleep, waking through the night until he was aged three. Now, 17 months after the arrival of his third and equally lively child Isabel, Joe has booked a consultation with infant sleep specialist Lucy Wolfe. After a year-long stint sleeping in the spare room, will he finally get that elusive all-night sleep he craves?**

### DAY 1

WE MEET in our home with child sleep coach Lucy Wolfe of Sleep Matters, an Irish company specialising in infant and child sleep problems.

I initially enquire about her thoughts on 'crying it out'. It's something I'm opposed to as I believe crying is an infant's sole means of verbally communicating a need. And Lucy agrees.

She firstly asks us to fill in an extensive questionnaire about Isabel's current daily routine.

Isabel usually wakes once during the night for a bottle and then again to be taken into bed alongside my wife, Gemma. Whenever I offer myself as a substitute, she screams until her mother appears. On the few nights that Gemma has been away, Isabel — and therefore her dad — barely sleeps a wink. While she eats well and is not hard to put down, during the night she exclusively wants her 'Mama'.

**8.15pm:** Tonight I am on duty for the entire night. 'Time for a sleepie?' I ask as she nods and puts thumb in her mouth. But when I zip her into her sleep bag, she gives the usual whimper. I pick her up and begin singing her favourite song. She closes her eyes. Two or three verses in, I lay her down and quietly leave the room.

**12am:** Isabel wakes, I settle her in my arms, she falls back to sleep.

**12.20am:** She wakes again, I settle her, she falls asleep.

**2am:** She wakes, I give her a bottle, she falls asleep.

**2.25am:** She wakes and is crying loudly. I think she might be teething so I put her back down and sit with her. Eventually, I bring her into my bed. Here she continues to not sleep properly, to wake constantly and cry. Eventually, Gemma comes in at 6am because Isabel's crying is relentless. In total, I get 90minutes sleep. Horror.

### DAY 2

LUCY returns with our plan. Firstly, she pinpoints Isabel's daily naps as a problem area. It seems we make the mistake that so many parents make: we assume that if we let our child sleep during the day, she won't settle later.

We are shocked to learn that Isabel is actually sleep deprived — at her age she needs an astonishing 15 to 16 hours sleep a day.

Lucy says she would like us to try two naps daily, each lasting 90 minutes. Bed-time will be also earlier — 7pm at the latest. We are to watch for sleep signals that will indicate that Isabel is tired and ready for her nap.

Isabel often falls asleep on the bottle in my wife's arms, but we are told this now needs to stop. Instead, she has to be put in the cot before she is asleep while we sit in a bedside chair to reassure her with our presence.

'Children are all born with the ability to sleep but we as parents intervene,' says Lucy, 'all these problems are generally behavioural responses to something the parent is doing.'

Lucy gives us a choice on the night-time bottle — wean her gradually or immediate cold turkey. We opt for the latter. And she's not allowed into our bed until all her bad habits have been reversed. Tomorrow is the first day of the new regime but we decide to start tonight. We have three weeks.

**6.50pm:** After a bath and a bottle downstairs, Gemma puts her to bed, stroking the back of her head through the bars of the cot. Isabel quickly reawakens, standing up repeatedly, Gemma lying her down again each time. She doesn't cry. Eventually, Gemma pretends to be asleep in the chair. Isabel begins to get sleepy.

**7.35pm:** She falls asleep.

### DAY 3

**7am:** Isabel wakes. Incredibly, she has just slept through the night for the very first time. Is it really that simple?

**9.10am:** I spot a sleep signal: thumb in mouth, looking for affection. We

### By JOE McNAMEE

head upstairs and I begin the routine of tucking her into her sleeping bag. Then, I put her straight into the cot, lying her down with a hand on her back through the bars of the cot.

As I begin singing to her, she turns around, wide-eyed, eventually standing up. This routine continues in a good-natured way for 50 minutes.

Finally, just as she is about to settle, the phone rings — it's Lucy checking in. I scramble for the off button but Isabel starts laughing, stands up and demands the phone. I put her gently down. She stands up and cries but I put her down again. Within minutes she is asleep.

**11am:** I wake her.

**2pm:** Gemma begins the nap routine aiming for sleep by 2.30pm. Two hours later, she's still awake, crying. Lucy says we should have left the room and come back five minutes later and performed a dramatic wake-up — pulling back the curtains and greeting Isabel as if she was just being woken.

**6.05pm:** I begin routine and she falls asleep within 30 minutes.

**7.30pm:** Wakes again. I put her back to sleep in minutes without lifting her.

**12am:** Wakes again but put her back to sleep with a lift up, put down and hand on back combination.

**4am:** Wakes for 45 minutes and cries repeatedly. I begin to worry. I pick her up and put her back down so reckon she wants to be fed.

**6am:** Wakes, I sit beside her, hand on back, she drifts off for five minutes, wakes again, doing this repeatedly.

**6.50am:** She suddenly sits up, wide awake, I go out and come back to do the dramatic wake-up. She is chirpy.

During the daily consultation, Lucy reassures me: 'We know she is capable of sleeping through the night. She's already done it once.'

### DAY 4

**9.30am:** I put her down, sing a song, she is asleep until 10am.

**2pm:** I experience complete failure. She lies there passively but shows absolutely no sign of tiredness. I do a dramatic wake-up at 3.20pm

**6.20pm:** Gemma takes her up and she is asleep within five minutes.

**11.30pm:** Wakes, crying hysterically. Gemma gives her Calpol but it is soon obvious it is not pain. Gemma finally gets her down again by 1.30am.

### DAY 5

**7.30am:** I wake her. Following further consultation with Lucy, we are reverting to single nap. And the chair is to be moved away from the bedside nearer to the bedroom door. Also, Lucy wants Gemma to put her down more as many of Isabel's sleep issues relate to her maternal attachment.

**12.15pm:** Gemma puts her down, she is asleep in three minutes.

**3.20pm:** Wake-up

**7.10pm:** Gemma puts her to bed, asleep by 8.10pm.

### DAY 6

**7.30am:** I wake Isabel.

**12.30pm:** Gemma puts her down, she is asleep 25 minutes later

**2.45pm:** Wakes up to the sound of Hector banging and crashing downstairs. He is beginning to show signs of impatience at how the new routine is entirely Isabel-centred.

**7.10pm:** Gemma puts her down, she is asleep by 7.40pm

### DAY 7

**7.20am:** Wake-up call.

**11am:** Gemma puts her down, sleeps for two-and-a-half hours

**7pm:** Gemma puts her down and she is asleep within the hour.