



HUSH LITTLE BABY

A child waking several times during the night can affect a whole family's quality of life.

This week we talk to paediatric sleep consultant Lucy Wolfe about tackling the problem – without leaving the child to 'cry it out'.

Cork mother-of-four Lucy is a chartered surveyor by trade. However, with the downturn in the property market she was forced to look to other strengths and skills to earn a living.

Children's sleep issues interested her greatly (her own children are nine, seven, four

A child not sleeping well can affect the whole family but there is hope, as sleep consultant Lucy Wolfe tells Margaret Hawkins, and the solution can be as simple as finding the right routine.

and a toddler) after being sleep-deprived herself when her eldest child was small. Having educated herself on the issue by reading a stack of books, she had heard many mentions of sleep clinics and sleep consultants but none were available in Ireland.

"My interest was piqued because there was no service here," she says. "Over the years I became the person that friends and family asked if they had problems with their kids not sleeping. It was at that point that I decided to get trained."

Lucy trained as a sleep consultant with the university of Reading and the Naturally Nurturing Sleep Clinic in the UK. "I also did a live internet programme through the US where I became what's called a gentle sleep coach," she says. "The training took two years altogether and I set up

my business in September 2011. Sleep deprivation can really have a huge impact on parents – and children. It can affect how we think, our mood, our performance and motivation," she says.

"There are also links to maternal depression and there are statistics out there for marital discord because of sleep deprivation."

So what is the real problem when it comes to getting young children to sleep – is it difficult children or untrained parents?

"It's a parent management issue," she says. "Sleep is a learned behaviour. While falling asleep is a natural process, learning to fall asleep unassisted is the learning component."

"If you get a child into the habit of needing a bottle to go to sleep or a soother or being rocked or you lying down with them then that's what

they'll need every night to go to sleep – and if they wake during the night.

"Sleep is made up of cycles and as the child transitions through their sleep phases and reaches a light sleep phase they will need something done to them to put them back to sleep again – whatever the parent had done before – because they are not independent at sleeping."

"It's about inappropriate sleep associations basically. What happens is that the parents can be in and out of the room like a performing seal, replacing the soother etc."

Parent coaching is the answer, she says.

"Sometimes the problem can be complex but sleep itself is very straightforward. Parents can get very emotional around the issue of their child not sleeping because they are so exhausted.

The children can be acting out of character because they are not well rested, too."

So what methods does Lucy use to improve things?

"My approach is to get parents to prioritise three weeks of their lives to sorting out the problem. It's family crisis time and we batten down the hatches. We are not just looking at bedtime or nighttime activity in isolation – it's sleep in a 24-hour context," Lucy says.

"What happens the baby in the daytime in terms of feeding and sleeping and exposure to fresh air and diet has a huge impact on what happens at night. We are dealing with all the variables – even where the child sleeps. Parents usually see improvement in the first four to six days but it normally takes two to three weeks to get it looking really perfect."

The lovely thing about

sleep problems is that they are mendable, Lucy says.

"One in four families have problems with sleep but it is mendable unless there are underlying medical conditions. Lots of parents get conflicting advice from well-meaning parents, parents-in-law and siblings but what works for one doesn't necessarily work for another. It's not a one-size-fits-all situation," she adds.

So does she leave the child to cry it out in *Super-nanny* style?

"My approach is very different to the Nanny approach. I don't do any 'leave the child on their own to cry'. Instead I do what's called a gradual retreat. I get the parent to stay with the child as they break the initial association. Say, the child is used to going to sleep with a bottle, we separate the feeding from the sleeping and while the child is learning the new piece of falling to sleep without the assistance, I get the parents to stay and do soothing techniques with them.

"I'm not into this 'no-eye-contact' approach because I

WORDS OF LIFE

Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.

Proverbs ch. 14 v 34.