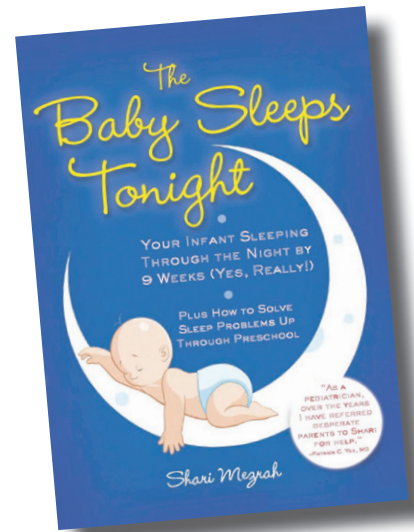


The Sleep Mom

Columbia Native Shari Mezrah Helps New Parents Get Some Shut-Eye BY JESSICA PERKINS



>> **Win a copy of Shari Mezrah's new book! Two lucky readers will receive *The Baby Sleeps Tonight: Your Infant Sleeping Through the Night by 9 Weeks (Yes, Really!)*. Enter to win online at www.insidecolumbia.net.**

It's 2 in the morning and you awaken to a timid little knock on your bedroom door. It swings open to reveal your child, who recounts a bad dream and tearfully requests to bunk with you for the night. Do you let him or her?

If you said yes, don't feel too guilty — you're in good company.

Sleep schedule specialist Shari Mezrah works with hundreds of families in similar predicaments each year. Whether it's a crying infant or a stubborn preschooler who's keeping your family up at all hours, Mezrah knows how to get everyone sleeping through the night.

Armed with tips and creative ideas along with a progressive plan honed while her own two children were small, Mezrah, nicknamed "The Sleep Mom," offers motherly advice to parents from all across the nation and even in other countries. In addition to running her BabyTIME consulting firm in Florida, the Columbia native has also written a new parenting book titled *The Baby Sleeps Tonight: Your Infant Sleeping Through the Night by 9 Weeks (Yes, Really!)*.

It all started when Mezrah's first child was born 11 years ago. "I started to feel myself slip. My son was about 2 weeks old at the time, and I felt really out of control. I honestly thought that all babies went to bed at 8 o'clock at night — nobody tells you that! Not your M.D., not your obstetrician," Mezrah says.

Mezrah also planned to return to work, and she worried about not getting enough rest. "I was like, OK, how am I going to do this? There's got to be a way! So I started playing around with things, and by the time my son was 6 weeks old, we had him sleeping from midnight to 6. We continued to extend the night after that."

Before long, Mezrah's friends began having children, as well. Time after time, they turned to Mezrah for advice about establishing a soothing sleep routine for their own families. Her friends recommended Mezrah to their friends, who in turn made referrals to their friends, and soon Mezrah found herself dedicating nearly all her time to helping new parents.

"I started helping families all over the country over the telephone, and they said, 'You know, you need to start a business.' That's when I started my business BabyTIME," Mezrah says. She now describes her profession as her life's passion. "I love helping people. I've always been solution-oriented, so that's why I really wanted to do this."

So just how crucial is it for new moms and dads to get sufficient sleep?

"It's extremely important for your health. When you're sleep-deprived, you really can't see straight. You kind of lose control," she says. "When you don't get enough sleep, it's a safety issue. If you happen to fall asleep while you're in the middle of something, you have to be responsible for your child. Mood is very important as well — you can become irritable and impatient, and that's not a very good feeling."

Mezrah recommends that parents take small steps to regain control of their lives and get the sleep they desperately need. "It's not like cold turkey and just letting the baby cry it out," she says. Instead, Mezrah

encourages families to consider all contributing variables, including sugar levels and caffeine in the mother's breast milk, babies who "snack" and wake up hungry in the middle of the night and co-sleeping situations.

"When babies come into this world, they have no concept of day and night. You kind of have to teach them," Mezrah says.

Her structured approach to developing healthy sleeping habits extends to the preschool and even elementary school years. The result? "I have clients with children who are 6 or 7 years old, and those children are independent and confident because everything was sort of outlined for them," Mezrah says. "And both my children are incredible sleepers. They sleep very well and they love their rooms. They've never slept in bed with us. When we cuddle, we cuddle and we have a great time, but they love their space," she says.

Mezrah may be a Florida transplant, but she traces the success of her business to her Missouri roots. "You know, I really attribute all of this to good, solid Midwestern values," she says. ■

>> The Sleep Mom's Top Tips

- Practice efficient feedings. "Learn how to efficiently feed your child, because if your baby isn't getting a full feeding and they're just what I call a snacker, they're constantly hungry."
- If you breastfeed, be mindful of your diet. "Everything you eat, your child eats as well. If you eat beans and garlic and all kinds of things that can cause you gastrointestinal distress, it can cause it for them, too."
- Incorporate bottle feeding at least once a day, even if you use breast milk. "Let Dad take over that midnight feeding from the very beginning so Mom gets some sleep. It also creates a wonderful bond between father and child."
- Recognize that nighttime crying is not necessarily hunger. "Your child could be tired, warm, cold ... If you feed your child every single time your baby cries, then your baby learns to expect that."
- Anticipate your baby's needs. "It's called predictable happiness — learning to be one step ahead of your child's needs. If you can anticipate when your next meal is coming, your child will, too."

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