

Case study



Taranis, 3 months old:

A case of saving Mum's career and Dad's productivity

Background and key challenges:

Both parents have highly demanding professions: Dad is a medical product designer and mum is a lead pharmacist for the NHS. Taranis is their first child. Before her arrival, Mum went through the trauma of a miscarriage followed by the death of her own father. At 3 months old, Taranis was only able to sleep when carried by a parent, night and day without respite. She would wake up frequently and required a considerable amount of input to get back to sleep. Mum felt unable to cope even at the most basic level. Consequently she socially isolated herself and was seriously considering giving up her career. She also feared for her effect of sleep deprivation on her bipolar disorder. Dad was up at 4am every day to take on the burden of his daughter's sleep difficulties. He felt his performance at work diminished but was unable to raise his concerns for fear of judgement or losing his job.

Problems:

- Movement addiction
- Parental anxiety

Aims and objectives:

- Help Taranis learn to fall asleep independently
- Safeguard the strong parental attachment that links Taranis and her parents
- Carry on breast feeding
- Develop a daytime structure to introduce predictability and consistency
- Lengthen her night-time sleep
- Consolidate her naps' durations
- Restore parents' confidence

Solutions:

- Strengthen parent/child attachment during wakeful times
- Get Taranis used to night-time context (silence, lack of movement)
- Work out Taranis's natural body clock and instigate nap structure
- Make an inventory of all sensory inputs that Taranis depends on to fall asleep, then de-escalate them in a sustainable and respectful way
- Build the parents' knowledge and confidence, being particularly careful about the mother's vulnerability

Results:

- Over a few weeks, Taranis gradually learnt to fall asleep independently
- As a result, her sleep lengthened from 40min to 6 hours cycles
- She is consistently in a good mood, calm, happy and confident.
- Mum is able to plan daytime activities around predictable naps and no longer feels emotional or isolated
- She feels confident that she will be able to return to work as planned
- Dad has regained full efficiency at work
- He no longer worries sick during working hours.
- Marital relationship improved
- Both parents thoroughly enjoy parenthood

Prevention:

This situation could have been avoided by learning about key elements* before birth:

- The impact of miscarriages and difficulties in conception on parenting decisions.
- Good and bad sleep associations.
- Routines: when and how to establish them
- The basic nervous system development of infants and how to support it
- How to prepare for a baby's transition from infant sleep to adult sleep often referred to as the four months sleep regression

** All covered in parental-leave workshops*