

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



*A Safe Sleep Initiative of the Tripartite First Nations
and Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health Strategy Area*

FACILITATOR NOTES

- Babies are gifts of life from the Creator. Sadly, sometimes our babies leave the circle suddenly and far too early as a result of SIDS.
- Sudden infant death syndrome, or SIDS, is the death of a baby under one year of age which is sudden, unexpected, and without a clear cause. SIDS usually happens during sleep or napping. The exact causes of SIDS are not known, but we do know there are ways to reduce a baby's risk for SIDS.
- The Honouring Our Babies – Safe Sleep Cards can be used by anyone wishing to discuss safe infant sleep with Aboriginal parents and families. The cards can be used in both one-on-one and group settings. You can choose the cards to discuss, or you can spread the cards out and ask families to choose the cards.
- Cards 1-7 focus on the most important practices for safe sleep. Cards 8-20 focus on other sleep situations that may be relevant to families.
- Discussing one card may take between 5-10 minutes, so you may not have time to discuss all the cards when speaking with families.
- The Overview Card covers all 7 of the most important practices for safe sleep, so remember to discuss this card at the end of each discussion with families.
- To download the Facilitator's Guide, Discussion cards and the Illustrated Cards, please visit: <http://www.fnha.ca>

Jordan W
2009



OVERVIEW:

**When you are at home or away,
how can you create a safe sleep
place for your baby?**

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

The most important ways to create a safe sleep place for your baby are to:

1. Place your baby on his or her back to sleep every time (at night and for naps).
2. Ensure a tobacco free environment while pregnant and after your baby is born.
3. Place your baby to sleep in the same room as you for the first six months (on a separate safe sleep surface). Adult mattresses are too soft for babies to sleep safely on.
4. Breastfeed your baby. It helps protect against SIDS.
5. Ensure your baby does not overheat while sleeping (do not use toques or hats indoors, heavy blankets, or swaddling).
6. Place your baby to sleep on a firm surface that is free of hazards. Waterbeds, adult mattresses, couches, recliners and sheepskins are not firm enough for baby to sleep safely. Loose blankets, pillows, and toys, should not be in your baby's sleep area.
7. Ensure the crib, cradle, bassinet, or other sleep equipment meets the safety standards in the Crib and Cradle Regulations. Cribs made before September 1986 do not meet the standards and should not be used.

When your baby is sleeping outside the home, take extra care to plan ahead to make sure your baby's sleep area is safe.

Jordan W
2009



1. What position do you put your baby to sleep in for naps and at night?

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- An important way to lower your baby's risk of SIDS is to always place your baby on his or her back to sleep for naps and at night.
- Placing babies on their backs to sleep is a traditional practice in Aboriginal communities, and so you can choose to whisper “look up to our ancestors” when you put your baby to sleep to help you remember.
- At around 6 months, babies may begin to roll onto their sides or tummies during sleep. That is OK.
- Remember to tell all elders, family members and babysitters who care for your baby to always place your baby on his or back to sleep for naps and at night.

Gordon W
2009



2. Is your baby around cigarette smoke?

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- Avoid cigarette smoke when you are pregnant and after birth.
- Cigarette smoke is very harmful to babies. It increases the risk of illness and SIDS.
- Make sure your baby is not exposed to cigarette smoke in the home or community. Talk with elders, family, and friends about not smoking in the house or anywhere near your baby.
- Second-hand smoke is more harmful to babies than to adults, because babies breathe faster and are still growing and developing.
- Smoking in the house leaves chemical residue on surfaces such as furniture, carpet, and clothing that babies often touch.
- Smoking outside the house such as on the porch, can still be harmful to babies.

*Gordon W
2009*



**3. Do you plan on having your
baby sleep in the same
room as you?**

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- For the first six months, place your baby to sleep in the same room as you on a separate safe sleep surface such as a crib. This is called 'room sharing' and it is an important way to lower your baby's risk of SIDS.
- Keeping baby close to you, but on a separate safe sleep area, while sleeping makes it easier to breastfeed, care for, and bond with your baby.
- Babies who sleep in the same room as a parent or other adult caregiver for the first 6 months have a 50% less chance of SIDS.
- You can place a crib or bassinet next to your bed. Or, if you are away from home and need to sleep on a couch, you can place the crib or alternative safe sleep surface next to the couch.
- Adult mattresses are not built for babies to sleep safely on because they are too soft.

Gordon W
2009



4. Can breastfeeding provide some protection against SIDS?

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- Breastfeeding provides some protection against SIDS.
- Breastfeeding for at least the first six months is very important and helps protect babies from illness. Continued breastfeeding to the age of two years and beyond is encouraged.
- Breastfeeding is the normal, natural way to feed babies. Breastmilk is best for babies and it is convenient and free. It is also good for a mother's health to breastfeed.
- If you are having difficulty breastfeeding, it may be possible get help from a public health nurse, lactation consultant or doula.
- See Appendix 1 in the Facilitator's Guide for resources to support breastfeeding.

*Gordon W
2009*



**5. Do you worry that your baby
won't be warm enough
when sleeping?**

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- It can be dangerous if your baby is too warm or overheated while sleeping. Overheating increases the risk of SIDS.
- If you are at a comfortable temperature in a room, your baby will be too. Don't overdress your baby, swaddle, or use hats inside the house.
- If room temperature is higher than 20°C, there is a risk for SIDS if the baby is overdressed, bundled, or close to external heat sources such as heaters or another person in bed.
- Warm weather is usually not a problem if your baby is not overdressed and can sweat.
- Your baby is more likely to get too hot if lying on his or her tummy. Always place your baby on his or her back for sleep, for naps and at night.

Gordon W
2009



6. Does your baby have his or her own sleeping surface that is firm?

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- Place baby to sleep on his or her own sleeping surface that is firm, flat, and free of hazards such as loose or heavy blankets, pillows, bumper pads, or stuffed toys.
- Some parents want to create a soft and snuggly sleeping place for their babies, but soft surfaces can be dangerous for babies.
- Avoid placing your baby to sleep on soft surfaces where his or her face can 'sink in' or can be easily covered by that soft surface.
- Remember, most adult mattresses are too soft for babies to sleep safely on, even when they feel firm and flat to the adult.
- Unsafe soft surfaces for babies include: waterbeds, pillow-top mattresses, couches, armchairs, recliners, and sheepskins. A baby can potentially get trapped in the sides of couches, armchairs or recliners.
- Avoid using loose or heavy blankets, quilts, pillows, stuffed animals or bumper pads in your baby's sleep area, which can cover the mouth and nose and block your baby's breathing.

*Gordon W
2009*



**7. What do you need to know
about your crib, cradle
or bassinet?**

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- Only use a crib, cradle, or bassinet that meets Canadian safety regulations.
- Cribs made before 1986 do not meet safety regulations and are not safe.
- Be sure each part of the crib is properly and securely in place at all times. Be sure nuts and bolts are on tight and the mattress is firm and fits the crib well.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions when putting the crib together.
- Drop-side cribs should have double locks for securing the drop side.
- The mattress needs to fit tightly against all 4 sides of the crib, so baby cannot become wedged in any gaps.
- Be sure to tighten loose screws regularly. Do not try to fix or repair a crib using rope, tape or wire.
- If using second-hand cribs, check internet for any recalls.

*Gordon W
2009*



8. If you have decided to share a bed with your baby, how can you make it as safe as possible?

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- Sharing a room with your baby who sleeps on a separate, firm, flat surface is safest. Sharing a bed with your baby is not recommended because it has some risks. Adult mattresses are not built for babies to sleep safely on – they are too soft.
- If you choose to bedshare, reduce the risk by: placing your baby on his/her back for every sleep; ensuring a smoke-free environment; using a firm and flat mattress; ensuring your baby will not fall out of the bed or get trapped between the mattress and the wall or bedframe; keeping your baby's sleeping area free from pillows, loose or heavy blankets and stuffed toys; keeping the covers away from your baby's head; preventing your baby from over-heating.
- All adults in the bed must know your baby is in the bed; adults in the bed should not have recently consumed alcohol, illicit drugs, or medication that makes it difficult to wake up; other children or pets should not be in the bed; your baby should never be left alone in the adult bed.
- Mother's who exclusively breastfeed and who do not smoke cigarettes are safer bedsharers.

Jordan W
2009



9. Have you considered talking to your family, elders or cultural support about cultural traditions of safe sleep?

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- Placing babies on their backs to sleep is a traditional practice in Aboriginal communities, and so you can choose to whisper “look up to our ancestors” when you put your baby to sleep to help you remember.
- In many Aboriginal communities, cradleboards or papoose boards were the traditional way to carry babies and keep babies safe when sleeping.
- If using cradleboard: (1) do not swaddle or fasten your baby tightly because your baby needs to be able to breathe easily and should not be over-heated; (2) a light blanket is all that is needed; (3) always place the cradleboard flat on the floor when the baby is sleeping, away from heaters or anything that could fall on the baby. Do not lean the cradle board against a wall or anything else. It is important to follow the key practices for safe sleep when using a cradleboard.
- Bed sharing may have been a common practice for our ancestors. However, many of our ancestors traditionally slept on a flat, hard surface such as a mat. Many people today sleep on soft mattresses with lots of pillows and blankets, which carry more risk for babies to sleep on.
- See Appendix 2 in the Facilitator's Guide for important information about cradleboards.

Gordon W
2009



10. What are the cultural ceremonies in your community related to childbirth?

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- Babies are considered to be gifts from the Creator in many Aboriginal communities.
- Participating in ceremonies can show love and respect for your baby.
- Have you considered talking to your family, elders or cultural support about cultural ceremonies related to pregnancy, child birth, placenta care, welcoming, belly button care, spiritual cleansing?
- Cleansing ceremonies are important in many communities to help cleanse the body, mind and spirit, and give prayers to the Creator.
- Because smudging creates smoke, which can harm your baby's lungs, ask elders about other ceremonies or ways to cleanse that do not create smoke. For example, fanning with an eagle feather or cedar brushing.

Gordon W
2009



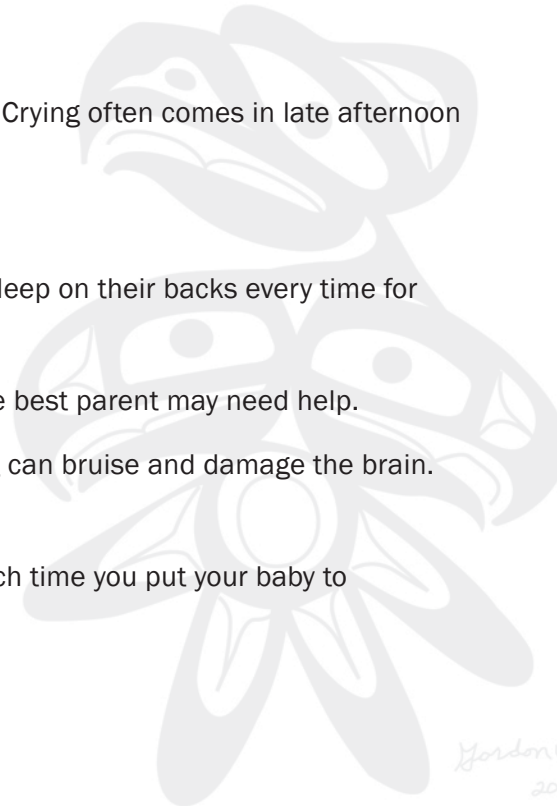
11. If your baby is fussy or cries a lot, in what position should you put your baby to sleep in?

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- Babies sometimes cry more than usual. Crying often comes in late afternoon or evening. It could last for hours.
- Fussy babies often sleep less.
- It is important to place a fussy baby to sleep on their backs every time for a nap and at night.
- A fussy baby can be frustrating, even the best parent may need help.
- Never shake your baby because shaking can bruise and damage the brain. This is called shaken baby syndrome.
- Remember to think about safe sleep each time you put your baby to sleep when trying to sooth a fussy baby.





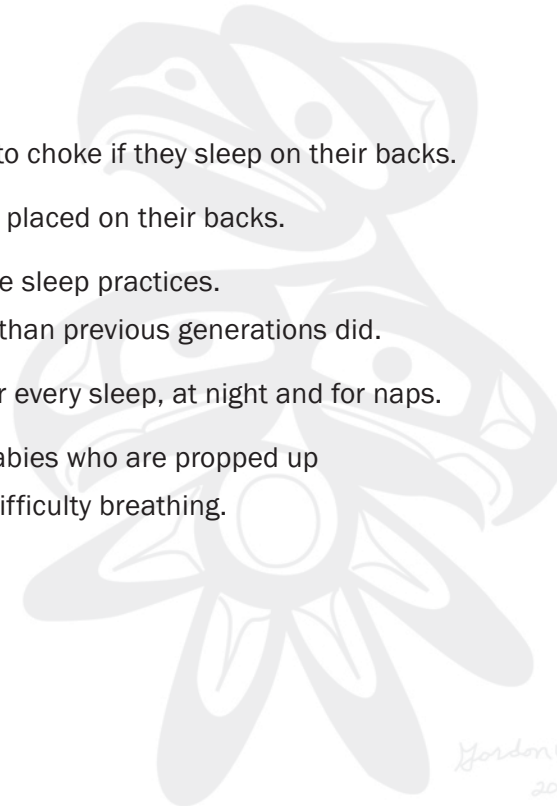
12. Is your baby spitting up a lot?
Do you worry that your baby
may choke while sleeping
on his or her back?

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- We now know that babies are less likely to choke if they sleep on their backs.
- Babies can clear spit-up and vomit when placed on their backs.
- There is more information now about safe sleep practices.
We now know more today about the risk than previous generations did.
- All babies should sleep on their backs for every sleep, at night and for naps.
- Do not prop up your baby with pillows. Babies who are propped up may roll over onto their faces and have difficulty breathing.





13. What is your safety plan for your baby if you attend an event where there may be alcohol or substance use?

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- Find family or friends who will stay sober and keep baby safe when you go out. Such as your partner, friends, relatives, aunties, uncles, sisters, or brothers.
- It's important for women to not drink alcohol while they are pregnant or breastfeeding. Because babies depend on us to take care of them and keep them safe, they need to have sober caregivers.
- It is dangerous for any adult to sleep in the same bed with a baby after drinking alcohol because it is harder to stay aware of body position and harder to wake up.
- Your baby will be safer in a crib, cradle or other safe sleep surface beside your bed.
- If you are breastfeeding and choose to have a drink that contains alcohol, you should plan feeding your baby around it. Feed your baby first and wait until the alcohol has passed out of your breastmilk before feeding again. You should talk to a health worker such as a doctor or nurse about the number of hours it may take for the alcohol to disappear from your breastmilk.
- See Appendix 1 in the Facilitator's Guide for resources on avoiding alcohol in pregnancy.

Gordon W
2009



14. How can you keep baby safe if you need to take medications that make you sleepy?

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- Is there anyone that can come and help you during these times such as your partner, friends, relatives, aunties or sisters?
- It is important to take any medication that is prescribed to you by your doctors.
- You or your partner should not share a bed with your baby if either of you have taken medicine that makes you sleepy. It is dangerous for any adult to sleep in the same bed with a baby after taking medication that makes them sleepy, because it is difficult to stay aware of body position and harder to wake up.
- Your baby will be safer in a crib, cradle or other safe sleep surface beside your bed.



*Gordon W
2009*



15. Are you having a difficult
time trying to quit smoking
cigarettes?

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- If you are pregnant and smoke, now is the time for both and your partner to reduce and stop smoking. Cigarettes contain many chemicals that can harm your health, and your baby's health. For your baby, exposure to cigarette smoke increases the risk of illness and sudden infant death.
- No matter which trimester in your pregnancy you are, it is never too late to quit smoking.
- To help you quit or reduce the amount you smoke: see your health provider, join a stop-smoking program, contact QuitNow by phone (1-877-455-2233) or online (www.quitnow.ca) for free, no pressure support, or call HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1.
- Remember to continue breastfeeding your baby, even if you smoke cigarettes.
- Make sure your baby is not exposed to cigarette smoke in the home or community.

Gordon W.
2009



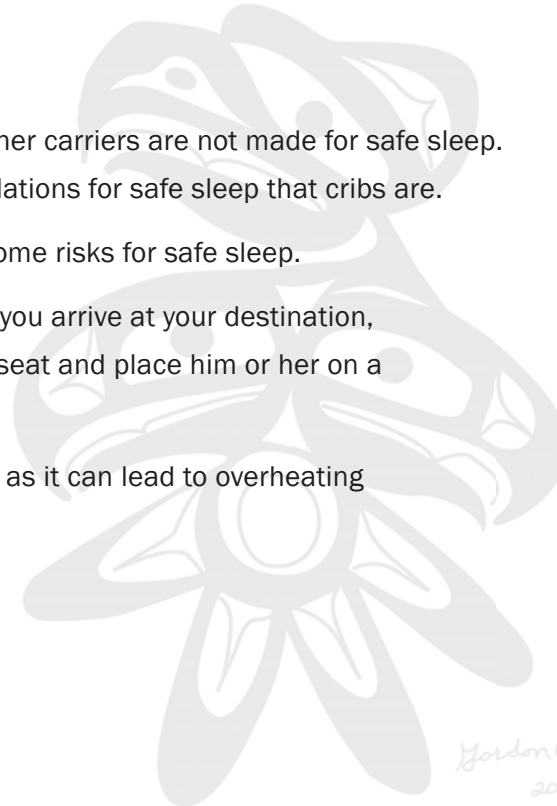
16. What should you do when
your baby falls asleep in a
car seat, stroller, or
baby swing?

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- Car seats, baby swings, strollers and other carriers are not made for safe sleep. They are not covered by the safety regulations for safe sleep that cribs are.
- Harnesses and sloped surfaces carry some risks for safe sleep.
- Check on baby on long car rides. When you arrive at your destination, makes sure to take baby out of the car seat and place him or her on a safe sleep surface.
- Swaddling babies is not recommended, as it can lead to overheating which is a risk for SIDS.





17. If you do not have access to a crib, cradle or bassinet, what can you use to make a safe sleep place for your baby?

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- Alternative safe sleep surfaces are available for little or no cost: (1) sturdy, laundry-type basket with a smooth, firm bottom, (2) heavy, reinforced cardboard box, (3) dresser, kitchen, or desk drawer, (4) metal or plastic basin with a flat bottom, such as a washtub.
- These surfaces only need a little covering (a pad or thin blanket that will not bunch up). Do not cover with thick blankets, sheepskins or comforters.
- If using a cradleboard, (1) do not swaddle (or fasten) your baby tightly, because your baby needs to be able to breathe easily and should not be overheated; (2) a light blanket is all that's needed; (3) always place the cradleboard flat on the floor, away from heaters or anything that could fall on the baby; (4) do not lean the cradle board against a wall or anything else. It is important to follow the key practices for safe sleep when using a cradleboard.
- See Appendix 2 in the Facilitator's Guide for important information about cradleboards.

Jordan W
2009



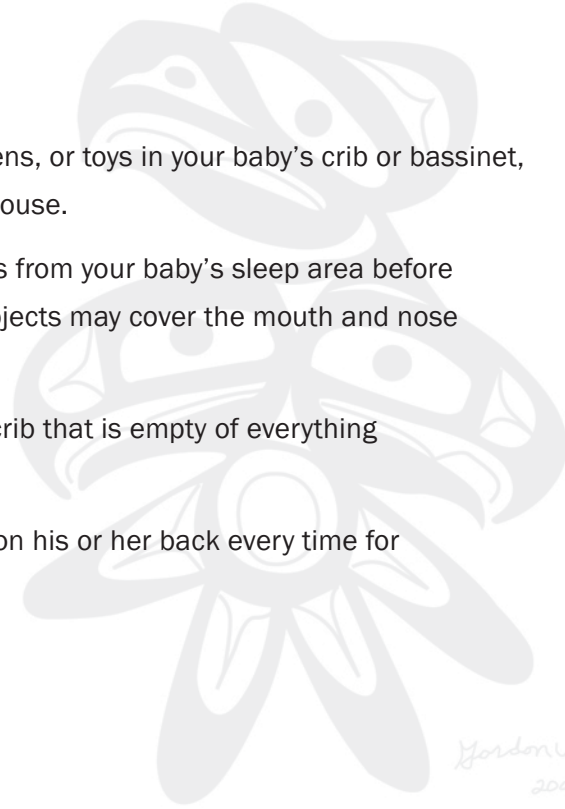
18. Do you sometimes store
clothes or toys in the crib
or bassinet?


HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- It may seem useful to store clothes, linens, or toys in your baby's crib or bassinet, especially if living in small or crowded house.
- It is very important to remove all objects from your baby's sleep area before you put him or her to sleep, as these objects may cover the mouth and nose and block baby's breathing.
- Your baby is safest when sleeping in a crib that is empty of everything but your baby.
- Remember to place your baby to sleep on his or her back every time for naps and at night.





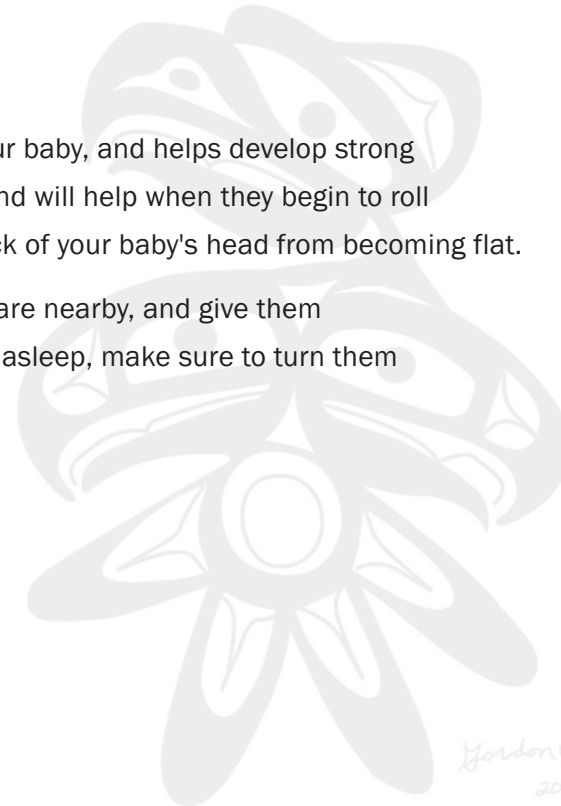
19. Does your baby need time
on the tummy when he
or she is awake?

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- Lying on the tummy is important for your baby, and helps develop strong muscles in the neck, back and arms, and will help when they begin to roll and crawl. It also helps prevent the back of your baby's head from becoming flat.
- Lay your baby on the tummy when you are nearby, and give them something to look at. If your baby falls asleep, make sure to turn them onto their back.





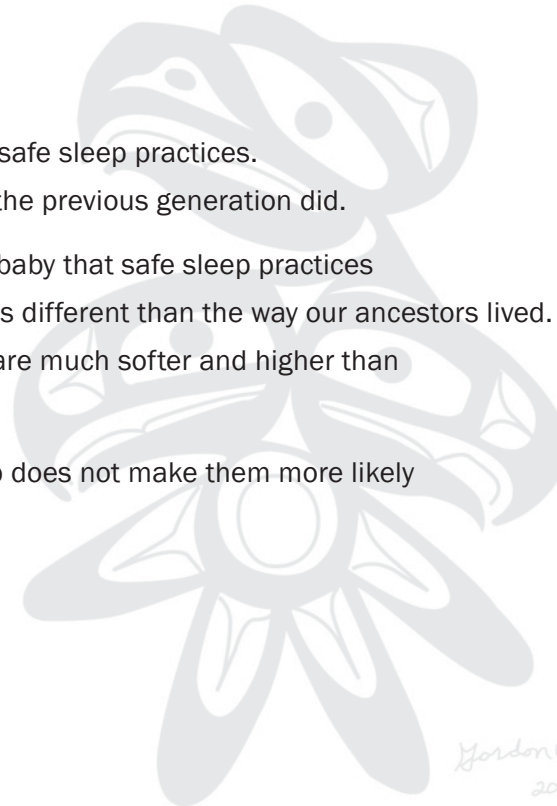
20. Is everyone giving you
different ideas about taking
care of your baby?

HONOURING OUR BABIES: Safe Sleep Cards



DISCUSSION POINTS

- There is more information now about safe sleep practices. We know more today about risk than the previous generation did.
- Educate everyone who cares for your baby that safe sleep practices have changed. The way we live today is different than the way our ancestors lived. For example, adult mattresses today are much softer and higher than the mats traditionally used for sleep.
- Placing babies on their backs to sleep does not make them more likely to spit up and choke.



Gordon W
2009