Wonderful Sounds for Sleep

By Elizabeth Pantley,
Author of the No-Cry Sleep Solution

The environment that your baby enjoyed for nine long months in the womb was not one of absolute quiet. There was a constant symphony of sound -- your heartbeat and fluids rushing in and out of the placenta. (Remember those sounds from when you listened to your baby's heartbeat with the Doppler stethoscope?) Research indicates that "white noise" sounds or soft bedtime music helps many babies to relax and fall asleep more easily. This is most certainly because these sounds create an environment more familiar to your baby than a very quiet room.

Many people enjoy using soothing music as their baby's sleep sound. If you do, choose bedtime music carefully. Some music (including jazz and much classical music) is too complex and stimulating. For music to be soothing to your baby, pick simple, repetitive, predictable music, like traditional lullabies. Tapes created especially for putting babies to sleep are great choices. Pick something that *you* will enjoy listening to night after night, too. (Using a tape player with an automatic repeat function is helpful for keeping the music going as long as you need it to play.)

There are widely available, and very lovely, "nature sounds" tapes that work nicely, too, as well those small sound-generating or white-noise devices and clocks you may have seen in stores. The sounds on these -- raindrops, a bubbling brook or running water -- often are similar to those sounds your baby heard in utero. A ticking clock or a bubbling fish tank also make wonderful white-noise options.

"I went out today and bought a small aquarium and the humming noise does seem to relax Chloe and help her to sleep. I didn't buy any fish though. Who has time to take care of fish when you're half asleep all day?"
Tanya, mother of 13-month-old Chloe

You can find some suitable tapes and CDs made especially for babies or those made for adults to listen to when they want to relax. Whatever you choose, listen to it first and ask yourself: Does this relax me? Would it make me feel sleepy if I listened to it in bed?

If you must put your baby to sleep in a noisy, active house full of people, keeping the tape running (auto rewind) will help mask baby-waking noises like dishes clanking, people talking, siblings giggling, TV, dogs barking, etc. This can also help transition your sleeping baby from a noisy daytime house to which he's become accustomed subconsciously to one of absolute nighttime quiet.

Once your baby is familiar with his calming noise, or music, you can use these to help your baby fall back to sleep when he wakes up in the middle of the night. Simply sooth him by playing the music (very quietly) during the calming and falling-asleep time. If he wakes and cries, repeat this process.

If your baby gets used to his sleep time sounds you can take advantage of this and take the tape with you if you will be away from home for naptime or bedtime. The familiarity of these sounds will help your baby sleep in an unfamiliar environment.

Eventually your baby will rely on this technique less and less to fall and stay asleep. Don't feel you must rush the process; there is no harm in your baby falling asleep to these gentle sounds. When you are ready to wean him of these you can help this process along by reducing the volume by a small amount every night until you finally don't turn the music or sounds on at all.

Babies enjoy these peaceful sounds, and they are just one more piece in the puzzle that helps you to help your baby sleep – gently, without any crying at all.

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