



## Getting a Baby Owl to Sleep

**Module:** IV  
**Topic:** Responding to Families in Culturally Sensitive Ways  
**Type:** Scenario/Case Study  
**Group Size:** Large Group/Small Group  
**Time:** 30 minutes

**Purpose:**

To provide participants with an introduction to the concepts of culture and cultural sensitivity and their importance when working with infants, toddlers and their families.

**What you will need:**

Participant Materials	Trainer Materials	Equipment
	:: <i>Hush-a-bye Babies</i> by Janet Slingsby  :: Flip chart paper with the titles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feelings of mom</li> <li>• Feelings of baby</li> <li>• Feelings of caregiver</li> </ul> :: Markers	

**Directions:**

See Attachment for Directions.

### Variations:

:: If training time is limited, the children's book could be shared without the follow-up discussion on Makiko in the child care setting. Instead, participants could be asked if they could think of any parallel situations that occur in child care settings.

:: Trainer could also discuss the impact the unsettled infant has on the group's dynamics. The participants could consider ways to communicate effectively with parents, consider ways to deal with caregivers' feelings, consider ways to meet the needs of the individual child, and consider ways to deal with the needs of the group.

### Links to Head Start Program Performance Standards:

:: 1304.21(a)(1)(iii)

:: 1304.21(a)(2)(i)

:: 1304.21(a)(3)(i)(E)

:: 1304.24(a)(1)(iii) Education and Early Childhood Development

### Activity Developed by:

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### Source Material:

Slingsby, J. *Hush-a-bye Babies*. Hauppauge, New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 2001.

### Directions:

1. Introduce the children's book the *Hush-a-bye Babies* by Janet Slingsby. As you are reading the book, invite participants to think about how the baby who can't go to sleep is feeling as this story unfolds.

(In this story all the little animals who live in one very large tree settle down to sleep for the night. The baby birds, the baby squirrels, and the baby mice all snuggle up in their nests. Even the baby rabbits in a nearby burrow are ready for sleep. But far out on a tree branch, one very unusual baby animal is wide awake and making a lot of noise.

The mother bird, concerned that her own children won't be able to fall asleep, first tries to quiet the baby by singing it to sleep, as she does with her own babies. It doesn't work. The mama and papa squirrel try rocking it to sleep, as they do with their own babies. It doesn't work. Daddy mouse tries cuddling the baby to sleep, which always works with his babies. It doesn't work.

As the adults are discussing in frustration what else they can try, the children gather and ask the new baby why he isn't sleeping and he says it is not his bedtime because he is an owl.)

2. At the completion of the story ask participants to share some feelings that the baby owl might be experiencing. Suggest to participants that in caring for infants and toddlers we are much like the bird, squirrels and mouse. Our first impulse is to act in the way we feel most comfortable, and do what was done in our own families. This is because our values, beliefs and caregiving practices are a reflection of our culture. If a child's family shares a similar cultural background to our own, this feels very comforting to the child, but if the culture is different, it results in the feelings you pointed out the baby owl might have been experiencing.
3. Suggest that you are going to look at a similar scenario but one taken from a child care center. As you read the scenario, ask one third of the room to reflect on how the caregivers are feeling, one third of the room to reflect on you the baby is feeling and one third of the room to reflect on how the mother is feeling.

*Makiko has just moved with her family from Japan. She has never slept by herself before. The first time she is put in a crib in the nap room, which is quiet and dark, she becomes very upset, and cries in a panicky, frantic way until the caregivers come and get her. It is obvious she is very fearful of the situation. Realizing that this is a new situation for her, the caregivers patiently try a number of strategies to help her feel more comfortable sleeping in the nap room. They try rocking her in the nap room, walking her until her eyelids start to droop, playing soft music, etc. - nothing works. Anytime a caregiver tries to lay her down, she awakens immediately and anxiously starts to cry.*

*During the day, Makiko will become so tired that she will fall asleep in the playroom, but awakens immediately if she is picked up. After several weeks the staff are becoming frustrated. They believe that babies should soothe themselves to sleep and should sleep in the nap room, where it is quiet and easier to keep them safe. One day they decide to let her "cry it out." Makiko never falls asleep and when her mother arrives, she has been crying for over an hour. Her eyes are red and swollen. Her cheeks are tear-stained and when she sees her mom, she frantically reaches out to her.*

4. Provide a few minutes for participants to write down their thoughts/discuss their ideas with others and then ask each group to report on:
  - How they think the caregivers feel?
  - How they think Makiko feels?
  - How they think Makiko's mom feels?

5. As participants report back feelings, it may be helpful to record them on flip chart paper to refer to later in the session. After discussing these feelings, point out that believing a child should be able to soothe themselves to sleep is a cultural belief. Believing a child should sleep with others so that someone is there if needed is also a cultural belief. Neither belief is wrong...they are simply different. However these differences can result in strong feelings for everyone involved. Knowing that this is true makes it an even more important to focus on culture.

If we understand that there are few universals in child rearing and that good child care can be done in more than one way, we are open then to conversations with parents about how they feel their baby should be taken care of.

The beginning point for all of us is knowing that the child and the family have something to teach you. Point out that in this session we are going to review what culture and cultural sensitivity is and then discuss with partnerships with parents mean