Introduction and Rachelu2019s background

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That was much more like attachment focused and I was like, well, this would be great. I could learn about sleep for myself, selfishly, right? And learn how to do things differently with this new baby.

But then also maybe I can see clients on the side, and this could be like a little side hustle for me. And I'd always loved babies. You know, I wasn't working with families already, so it just felt like an natural fit for my.

So that was kind of my idea for maternity leave project that I somehow managed to that while home with my new babies over maternities leave. Hello, everybody.

Welcome to Spoil Your Baby podcast. I'm very excited today to have Rachel Shepard-Ota here with us. I think you're doing such an amazing job sharing this world of parenting and normalizing sleep and supporting parents' sleep, and so many other things as well.

Will you tell us a little bit, I mean, most people know who you are, but for anyone listening who doesn't, tell a us little about yourself and how did you get into this word of babies.

Yeah, thank you. So, yeah, I'm Rachel, and I founded Hey Sleepy Baby back in 2020. And I was a special ed teacher for about a decade before that. When I started the platform, it was actually on maternity leave with my second baby.

Um, so it's, you know, on a maternity leave from teaching. It was COVID. I had kind of gotten into this world during that time thinking, A, a side income because teachers here in the States are broke.

But I also, I was also just really searching for alternatives to sleep training. So I sleep trained my first, it was a horribly traumatic experience, which I've talked about a lot on my page.

And so I, was just doing a lots of research and digging around and I found a certification that seemed really cool. that was much more like attachment-focused and I was like, well, this would be great.

I could learn about sleep for myself selfishly, right? And learn how to do things differently with this new baby. But then also maybe I can see clients on the side and this could be like a little side hustle for me.

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gonna somehow, somehow manage to do that while home with my new baby. Moms are amazing. You can do a lot. We can anything, right? I know. So, yeah, so I did do it and, you know, started the Instagram page around the same time and you, know it kind of just took off.

And so, I never actually returned to teaching and just really leaned into it. I love that. It makes me so excited about the enthusiasm people have about what you share in the world.

Right? It just, every time I see you… You know, success in this place, it just like opens it up, my heart, you know?

It's like, how exciting. I know.

Same. It is great. Anytime I see like some other new up and coming account that's kind of doing similar things or, books or podcasts or whatever it is, I'm just yes, like it's happening.

We're changing things slowly, but it'll happen. Absolutely. Still like a lot. You know, I always say that, it's still so much more to come. I think the default really is still sleep training and, you know more behaviorist lens.

Definitely. Especially, yeah, definitely. And especially here in the States, there's so many extra pressure because of the lack of maternity leave and support.

Um, but I mean, even I see with, like your book has been Revolutionary. And, like, such a huge piece of the change, I think. I mean, hear from people all the time talking about just how much they love it and how transformative it was for them.

So, yeah, we're doing the work. Yeah, completely, and I feel like the pace of it spreading is increasing, right? Yes. In a lot of places. At least, you know, when I started, I have a lot of colleagues, a lotta people who may be similar to you as well.

I just didn't know there was any choice at all. And now I think maybe that awareness is kind of there. A little bit more. Yeah, I it's a little more, yeah.

Because even when I first became a mom, it spent about eight years, and there really was no other option in my mind.

Planning for a second baby and easing pressure

Like bed sharing was just not even something that I ever… It never even entered my mind as something to say, oh, yeah, that sounds good, or no, I don't want to do that.

It was just like, not even on my radar at all. Co-sleeping was not an option in my head. Um, it was all sleep training. Or nothing. Sleep training or suffer was basically it.

Yeah, completely. So it's great. It's a great that we're that were here. Yeah. Today we are going to talk about a topic within, you know, this realm that I get asked a lot.

I know you get a asked about and it is adding new baby to a family that's supporting nighttime sleep, right? So Yeah, sometimes people have fears about it or just don't know what it's gonna look like.

So, I think we should talk about and help people listening, maybe some people who have their first baby right now and, you know, have questions, or people that have already welcomed a second or third or fourth or, onwards baby and can be more at ease.

Right, with the transition. Yeah. Why don't we start with your experience? Yeah, like you said, I think it can be… Let's start it with you experience, because you have a few little ones.

Yes, yeah, so I have three. So there are just about eight, five and a half, and almost three, um, And yeah. I mean, you sad parents are sometimes scared and I can so relate to that feeling.

With my son, I mentioned we sleep trained. We tried it several times, but it never worked. So he really didn't start sleeping through the night until about one, which actually is…

pretty great now that I know more. I don't know, exactly. But even still, we weren't ready to have that conversation about a second until he was about 18 months.

And then with our second, she took longer, so I kind of had to nudge her along and night wean her for her to actually start sleeping through the night, and that was at about two.

That was when we were kind like, okay, maybe we can start to think about another one. So I also just wanna let people know, I think there's so much pressure to have your kids super, super close in age and to get pregnant by the time they turn one or something like that.

And I mean, there're all different factors for people's fertility, so I won't make assumptions, but I will just say, removing some of that pressure can be really helpful.

You don't have to start to think about it when you're still in the midst of really tough sleep or sleep deprivation. Like you can give it some breathing room, Um, or at least that was the case for me.

That felt better for to kind of know that my older one was settled and we were sleeping through the night and were getting good sleep again and then I felt like I had to dive in.

And it's also a bit of nature's design in some ways too, right? It is a very weird North American thing to say, my kids have to be one year apart. Like, that's the only way they'll be friends.

No, like my husband's 13 years apart from his sister and they're best friends and she's my best friend too. And I'm also like 10 years older than her.

You know, like it is not true. Um, and also the other thing that comes into it as people think like, oh, the baby ears suck. They're so they're the worst.

So let's cram it all in. Let me get it over with. Right? Right. Why would you do that to yourself? There's so much joy and beauty to be reaping in those early years that I would really want to bust that myth.

I'm so happy you brought that up. Like, many health professionals will say, you know, 18 months to two years for your own body to replenish nutrients to grow another baby.

And then it's the sleep, right? Like two to 2 and a half is like the long end of when a lot of little ones will start to sleep through the night. Yeah, and then, it kind of makes sense.

Right? Yeah. Exactly. Yeah, exactly. It all makes sense. And so, yeah, so I would say first thing is just like remove that pressure. Then the other thing, is a lot of people will come to me really panicked saying, my toddler's still bed shares or my toddlers still nurses at night.

I just found out I'm pregnant. What am I gonna do? I am freaking out. Usually the first things I'll say is like, okay, you just find out you're pregnant?

A lot can change in nine months. It's not going to necessarily look the same as it does now. Things could really change even if you don't do anything.

So just relax. And there's a lot you can do in the meantime to set yourself up. Um, and I think the other thing is really just preparing for, I don't want to say preparing, for the worst, because that sounds scary, but you want it just have realistic expectations and know that your toddler may regress, even if they were sleeping through the night.

So like, what's going to be your plan for that? So just having a really flexible plan of how you'll tackle it all in the, night, it can be really helpful.

Completely, completely. And one other thing that came up to and it really relates to what you're saying now as well is like when people are thinking about it and they let's say they do, you know, for let say for age reasons or fertility reasons like.

are needing to have babies really close together, right?

Toddler sleep changes before baby arrives

Because everyone has different needs and things, so I always will say too, like, also just be conscious and aware that you're gonna have two babies, either like…

But fully know you will have to babies that are both gonna sleep like babies or if you have the option, you could space it out a little bit more naturally.

That's such a good way to think about it. Because people have twins. There's lots of people taking care of twins and not sleep training them. And that's a whole other…

Well, a two-year-old is still a baby. I mean, my third is almost three, and we still look at her like a Baby, because she's just the baby of our family.

Like, she is a BABY. But I know that if I brought home a newborn right now, if we had gone for that fourth and I had a new born, She would seem huge in comparison.

Yeah, thinking about it like two babies is actually really good, because your toddler will seem so old in comparison to the new baby, but they're really still so tiny.

Completely. That's why I always like put out that reminder, like your two-year-old's a baby. And then if we don't have that view, then we kind of might start putting too much pressure on that two year old, right?

Which is gonna work against everything. More stress is going to be a player factor in sleep as well. Okay, so let's imagine a mom, let say she's like messaged us like, help, like what can sleep look like when I add a baby?

Let's say, she has a a about to turn three, you know, almost out of the baby stage. Maybe, let's say they're waking, like maybe they need like, you know, help once in the night, something like that, just to like keep that a more complicated situation.

And about to have a baby, the baby's coming in like two months. What could that… And there are two parents in a home, what could look like? What are their options?

Yeah, I feel like this is probably kind of like the most common scenario, right? Is a toddler still maybe needing some support at night, which is, as we know, totally normal, and they're about to welcome a baby, there's two parents.

So I would just give them all of the options. And I'd say, do you want to make a change to your toddler's sleep before the baby comes? Because I don't want you making that change when you're like 39 weeks.

We want that change to be on the earlier side so that you have lots of buffer time, lots time to adjust. I always say like, don't bring your baby home and that's the night you kick your toddler out of your bed because then they're gonna resent the baby.

Like, what's the baby going to be? Right. You want to give these changes some space to breathe, right? So, say you really are not interested in co-sleeping with both of them.

you're worried that they'll wake each other up, you are worried they're not going be safe if they are in the bed with you together, whatever your reasons are.

Then you might want think about, okay, let's transition toddler to their own room. And if they're still needing support at night, I actually just got off a call with a mom yesterday where this was kind of their situation, where the toddler did still need support.

At night they were neurodivergent. They were still waking up, taking a while to settle at nighttime. And so they decided to kind do this divide and conquer, which I think a lot of parents just naturally fall into, Which was the dad in this situation took over the toddler while mom was still pregnant.

and they actually did a stagger like every other night. So every night mom would do bedtime and dad would bedtime so that the Toddler really got used to both parents doing it.

And then as she got later on in her pregnancy and especially as the newborn arrived, it was shifting to mostly dad doing bedtime. She would still be involved in parts of it, right?

So she would cuddle and read the books or she'd do the bath or something so they still had that nice connecting time and the toddler didn't feel totally replaced.

Um, but the one actually doing the soothing to sleep and responding to the night wakes and even co-sleeping with the toddler in a full-size bed in his room overnight was the dad.

And then mom was in the bedroom with a newborn. I think that situation works really well for lots of families is just that kind of like, yes, they have their own space and we're also going to kind divide and conquer as needed.

That was kind what we fell into actually with my third as well because my middle at the time was two and a half. She'd been sleeping through since we weaned.

So for about six months and then once the baby came, she regressed. Very common. And we were also moving during this time. so she was in a new bedroom and it was just like a lot of change thrown at her all at once.

she had just started preschool the month before. It was a just a a for her. Um, so the regression made complete sense. But she wanted to come in the bed with us and we Again, we were not in our normal, uh, space.

We were in a queen-size bed. Tiny bedroom. I was like, my husband's six foot tall and gigantic. -"We're not sharing the bed with you." -"There's only a certain amount of space." And having a baby.

Like, exactly, like I'm not doing this. So we started just having, you know, everybody would go to bed in their own rooms. And then inevitably, she would wake up, 12, 1, 2, something like that.

That would be the point where my has been would get up and go into her room and sleep with her in there for the rest of the night. And that worked well for a few months and then she grew out of that.

You know, everything is just a phase two. We have to just think about like, one phase at a time. What can we do right now to get the most sleep and survive?

Knowing that it's not gonna be like this forever. we're not going to have do this for ever. I think that's another huge piece to remember. So important for every single stage.

And I love that approach and I, I thinks it works for so many families. and also I feel for pregnant mom. Right? The last trimester. I'm like, you need some space.

You're gonna have your own sleep disruptions. Your own, right? So it is lovely for pregnant mom to have dad take over, if that's available for a family.

or another. Yeah, it's really nice. And I get it that it is emotional. I mean, we kind of did the same thing when we were expecting our second. My husband just totally took over bedtime with our first.

We just kind fell into that pattern and I know it was emotional, like I remember a few months into our new baby, our 2nd being born, I was like, oh my gosh, a year.

You know, like, it had been such a long time and I felt really sad about that. But then I was able to watch my husband and him have this really sweet bond.

So it's, you know… It's just always changing. Of course. We always feel that as moms, right? Like… Yeah, we feel the guilt and then… But my husbands like yeah, but I love it.

This is great because I'm away from him all day. And, um, so yeah. Yeah. I knew, I always think it was hard but there are lots of different… you know, all like feeding and the early days of years of sleep and…

Oh, yeah, I put my time in. Yeah. And I also think too, like that's, that is always like, there always is grief around that too. Like letting go of like all the care and, you, know having your heart expand for another baby and and care that baby needs.

Um, and I always say too like always be curious about those feelings and like what needs are underneath, right? And so if it's like oh, Maybe the connection time with that older child, you feel like you're missing that.

Bedsharing, safety, and divide-and-conquer setups

It's like, let's put that in another part of the day. because they're gonna need that anyway when the new baby comes. Oh, for sure. You're going to have to be so intentional about that and it's so much easier said than done.

But a lot of moms do come to me and say things like this where they are like, please tell me it is going be okay and that I'm going love this new babies as much because I am just so heartbroken about things changing now with my oldest and the fact that they will not be my only one anymore and I have share my attention like it.

It really is something that a lot of people worry about and have, like you said, that grief around. So just be gentle with yourself around that. And also, there are other creative ways, if you really feel like bedtime is your special sacred time with your older child, Put the new baby in a carrier and have your partner take them on a walk around the block while you do bedtime or, you know, pump a bottle and, have them do that feeding or something.

Like there are other ways around that too. I've had clients too where the newborn is really easy going and often leave. Yep. And can just lay there with you.

Or they're like in that carrier. Or you're just nursing them and yeah, you are nursing in the bed while you lay with your toddler and listen to a story or something and then they fall asleep.

Like there are also ways and for solo parents, that's not what you have to do. So yeah there's creative options all the way around I think. But I also think if there is the option of not doing it all every day.

Yeah, exactly. Don't. Like, we need to have some time too, right? So like the every other night thing, there's just so many options in what we can do.

And like you said, nothing lasts forever. The first few months with the newborn might look very different than like month six, or month 10. or whatever it is.

Totally, totally. Yeah, I think it's actually pro… I mean, granted, there are newborns that come into the world very alert and colicky and witching hour, like those evening bedtime hours might be hardest for some, but for a lot of people, those first couple months, they're just so sleepy.

If they are being held and fed, They're completely fine. And then once they start to wake up to the World, you really have to start learning how to balance both kids' needs, right?

But… Up to that point, it might be a little more chill. Yeah, I also love, because I think it's something parents do need to hear a lot, like adding a new baby.

Like, say it again, that it is going to be okay. Right? Because I'll also hear… It's going be, okay! I will also here people feel like they're cheating on their first baby with their second baby, right?

And I just think that reassurance you're giving right now that your heart does expand that you find that new flow is really important. Absolutely. And I think, also, just normalizing that it might not be immediate.

Like, every birth and postpartum is so different, depending on so many different factors, and if you don't feel that immediate bond, or you didn't that immediately bond with your first and you're worried you won't again, like, they're all different experiences, at least they were for me.

Um, but yes, you will, I promise you, will love your second more, as just as much as your First. I was about to say more than your 1st, that's… That was not a 41 flip, I promise.

But you definitely, you're definitely well. 100%. Okay, so that's amazing. Let's talk about the other option that some people take too, which is not changing very much.

Yeah, so a lot of people want to just keep things the same and continue bed sharing with everyone and for some kids, you know, that is necessary to have everybody co-sleep together for whatever reason.

And you also talked about before like having the plans for like if it goes, right? Yes. Totally, totally. Like I said, like when we welcomed our third, our second was just getting up and walking herself to our room.

What are we gonna do? Lock the door? Like, she's gonna come into our rooms, so we have to figure it out. So I'm sure you talk about this all the time and like the different safety aspects.

For me, what I did was, um, because we did have those nights where we were just like, okay, fine, come in. Um… So what we did was we had a bassinet right next to the bed on my side for the baby.

She, the, baby didn't love that. So she actually, she spent most of the time in my bed. Um, so what did, was, you know, set up our bed for safely sleep seven.

And if my toddler did come in, She was always on the other side. It was my body in between the toddler and the Baby, which is like a non-negotiable. Um, and when we did have, when were in that other house and that was too crowded, my husband would get up and go to a different bedroom or go sleep on the couch or something so that we had a little more space.

Um… But yeah, I would say, what would you say? I'd say those are the most important things is making sure it's, you know, safe sleep, seven approved beds, uh, sleep space, And then also making that your toddler is never the one next to the baby, especially in the newborn phase.

Absolutely, because, You know sleep guidelines do say not to have a second baby in same bed. as a newborn. And then, so we have got, like, for everything, we've got guidelines, and then we got someone's real life.

Right? And so that they can be as informed by them as possible. So, I would say exactly what you said, right? Like, it would be, Plan A would great if newborn was comfortable in a little bassinet, if the toddler had to join.

Um, And if that doesn't work, then you are in the cuddle curl, you know, doing the same thing, toddler knowing, like, you're gonna be sleeping on my backside, right?

Like, I need to cuddle a new baby. Um, and then also knowing your toddler. And I would say even… Sorry, go ahead. I was gonna say, even, no, probably similar to what you were just saying about knowing you toddler, that might take some practice for some, really…

those Velcro toddlers who need to be sleeping with you like in a bear hug, if you really don't think they're gonna be able to adjust to their own space and time for baby, then maybe what you're working on is just turning your back to

them in preparation.

Because again, you don' want that to happen the first time. when you bring your baby home that first night. So even just practicing, if you know you want to continue bed sharing, or you that's just what they're going to need, practice just turning your back to them.

Practice putting some space in between your bodies in the same bed. Even that can set yourself up for And easier transition. Such a good tip for that prep, for the prep phase.

Um, but yeah, and I was gonna say also know the toddler about like, are they like a wild animal in their sleep? Like some will flop over you and be really active.

And in that case, you probably do want to do everything you can not to have that toddler and especially with a newborn. Yeah. And in that case, I would say like a happy medium would be maybe a floor bed in your room.

So they're still on their own space, keeping baby safe, but they are not, you know, in their room if you don't think that's gonna be possible for them.

Another parent. Yeah, because that's there too. And just all those options there, right? Keeping it in the mix and like… Yeah. So that a ton of options.

Yeah 100%. And it might be different every night. Sometimes it's like a musical bed situation where every day is something different, but you've got like this menu of choices now that you know can work.

Completely. I think that's really helpful for parents. I mean, I it's hard for parent in this day and age not to have a rigid plan to know what's gonna work.

That's where all the sleep training psychology comes from. It's like, just tell me exactly what to do and I'll follow it. This is very flexible. Because it is uncomfortable for us to not know.

Flexibility, sibling sleep, and where to find Rachel

Yeah, it's uncomfortable, I think, for us to not have one answer or one right solution. But that's just, welcome to parenting. There's no one… And life.

It's a good lesson for everything. We have to be flexible, dynamic, we have be considering everyone's needs in the family, and figuring out what can work.

Right? Exactly. Yeah. Completely. Anything else that you can think of, We did a great job there. I know, I feel like we covered a lot. Um, no, those are really the main things.

Like, just remembering to be flexible, remembering everything is a phase, and you will be fine. And for, yeah, people who do, you know… the planning part, the preparation part or keeping things as they are and just continuing to, to sleep as you sleep.

It, again, might not go as planned. Right? Knowing that. Yeah. And I will also say, I know a lot of people are scared to have another baby because their first is such a tricky sleeper, and so I'll also just say every child's sleep modes are so different.

Like, even kids with the exact same genetics, the same household, same parenting, all my kids have been different sleepers. So… You know, I'm not gonna promise you that if you have a hard first, that your second will be easier, because it's unfortunately not an exact science, but just know that they'll be different.

And you'll different because you don't have such perspective. Very anecdotally. I see second babies and some of it I think is parents' comfort. Exactly.

Right? That does play a role. Like some people are shocked. They're like, first baby was… you know, for them, like, incredibly challenging and they're like this second baby is, wow, very different, right?

And so again, no promises because… No, but what I also hear a lot though is that, okay, my second maybe isn't necessarily a better sleeper, But I don't care as much.

I know how to flow with it. Or I feel more equipped now. Yeah, I am so much more flexible now, Like I'm not an anxious mess about their sleep, so it's just an overall…

Not trying to force a schedule. Yeah. So it's like I'm actually getting more sleep because I've kind of figured out how to do that. Um, so yeah, I think that's really helpful for people to know too.

Yeah, thinking of like with your second baby, So many of the unknowns are known. And the habits are there. And that in itself is a huge help as well. Exactly.

Amazing. These tips are gold, I would say. If you want help with your individual situation, There's lots of people you can talk to. You can talked to Rachel.

Yep. And you could talk me, you talk all the other amazing helpers there are out there. Um, because sometimes we really do need that individual support, even pros like us.

I think you really can't even help yourself, right? No, absolutely. Yeah. I think, I mean, it's just like therapy, right? Like everybody can benefit from therapy.

Everybody can value benefit, from having someone just bounce things off of, you know, validate your choices and all of that stuff. So yeah, we're definitely here to help anybody that's going through this.

Will you share with us how people can stay in touch with you and find all your work? Sure. So I'm just at HeySleepyBaby most places. Instagram is where I am most active and then my website is were you can find my resources which range from one-on-one consultations with my team to guides and free resources and blog posts.

I have blog post about all of this stuff that are totally free about managing sibling sleep and stuff like that. Awesome. Thank you so much, Rachel. Happy to see you.

Thank you. So happy to see you too. Thanks for having me.