

WORKING PARENT SLEEP SURVIVAL GUIDE

*Navigating Sleep Regressions While
Protecting*

Your Career and Your Sanity

WORKING MOM SLEEP SURVIVAL

Practical strategies for balance
& restful nights



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Working Parent Sleep Survival Guide

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First Edition

*For every parent who has ever answered
a work email at 3 AM
while bouncing a sleepless toddler.*

*You are doing more than you know.
And you deserve rest.*

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Introduction

The 5 AM Meeting and the 3 AM Wake-Up Call

You're a professional. You're ambitious. You're a parent. And you are exhausted.

You're juggling deadlines and diapers, presentations and playdates. You've mastered the art of the muted Zoom call while a toddler screams in the background. You've sent emails you barely remember writing because you typed them at 4 AM after the third wake-up of the night.

And now, just when you thought you couldn't possibly stretch yourself any thinner, a sleep regression has hit. Your nights are as demanding as your days.

This is the working parent's dilemma. A sleep regression is hard for any family, but for working parents, it can feel catastrophic. The stakes are higher. A sleepless night doesn't just mean a grumpy day; it can mean a fumbled presentation, a missed deadline, or a career that feels like it's slipping through your fingers.

I'm Marli Benjamin, a mum of two who has lived this exact nightmare—twice. I worked through both of my children's major sleep regressions, and I learned the hard way what works and what doesn't when you're trying to survive on three hours of broken sleep while still performing at work.

This guide is different from the others in this series. This isn't primarily about your child's sleep—it's about YOUR survival. It's about protecting your career, your sanity, and your well-being while navigating the storm of a sleep regression.

We'll adapt the **DREAM Method** for the realities of a working parent's life. You'll learn time-efficient connection strategies, how to get your partner and childcare providers on the same page, and how to let go of the guilt and perfectionism that are holding you hostage.

By the end of this guide, you will have a sustainable plan—not a perfect one, but a good-enough one that actually works in real life.

Let's get you back to a place where you can thrive, not just survive.



You can do this—and you don't have to do it alone

PART ONE

**The Working Parent's
Dilemma**

When Work and Sleep Deprivation Collide

For a working parent, a sleep regression isn't just a family problem; it's a professional crisis. The skills that make you a great employee—your focus, your drive, your attention to detail—are the very skills that are eroded by chronic sleep deprivation.

Let's be honest about what you're up against.

Why Sleep Regressions Hit Working Parents Harder

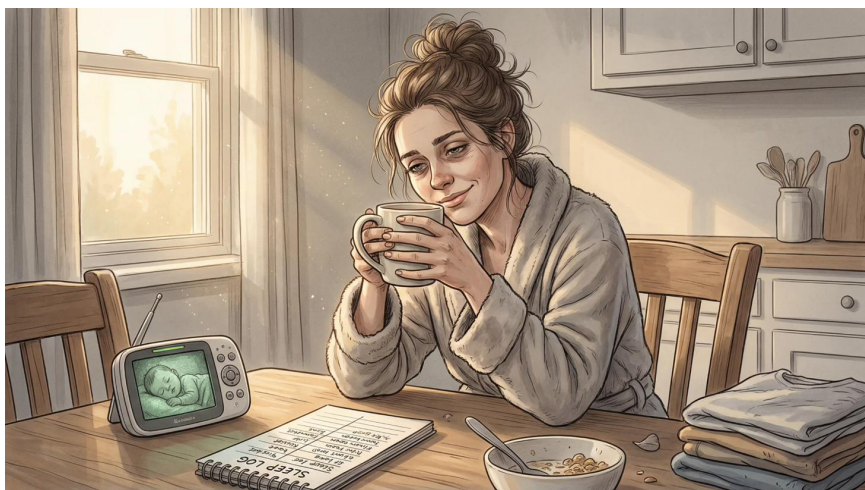
- **The Time Crunch:** You have a finite number of hours in the day. When your nights are spent battling a sleepless toddler, there's no opportunity to 'catch up' on rest. Stay-at-home parents can sometimes nap when the child naps; you're in meetings.
- **The Performance Pressure:** You are expected to perform at a high level at work, regardless of what happened at 3 AM. Nobody cares that you were up five times. The deadline doesn't move.
- **The Guilt Multiplier:** Many working parents already feel guilty about time spent away from their children. When you're exhausted and irritable during the limited time you do have together, that guilt multiplies.
- **The Invisible Labor:** Even if you have a partner, the mental load of managing the household, childcare logistics, AND a career often falls disproportionately on one parent. Sleep deprivation makes that load feel crushing.

The Myth of 'Having It All'

The cultural narrative of the parent who effortlessly juggles a thriving career and a perfect family is a dangerous fantasy. The reality is that something has to give, and for many working parents, it's their own sleep and well-being.

This guide is about rejecting that myth. You don't need to 'have it all.' You need to have **enough**. Enough sleep to function. Enough connection with your child. Enough performance at work to keep your career on track. Enough margin to not lose your mind.

That's what we're aiming for. Not perfection—sustainability.



Coffee helps. A plan helps more.

The Science of Stress, Sleep, and Performance

Understanding what sleep deprivation actually does to your brain can help you take it seriously—and give you ammunition when you need to advocate for yourself.

How Sleep Deprivation Affects Your Work

- **Cognitive function drops significantly.** After 17-19 hours without sleep, your cognitive performance is equivalent to having a blood alcohol level of 0.05%. After 24 hours, it's equivalent to 0.10%—legally drunk.
- **Decision-making suffers.** Sleep-deprived brains take shortcuts, rely on habits, and miss nuances. Complex decisions become harder.
- **Emotional regulation decreases.** You're more likely to snap at a colleague, take criticism personally, or feel overwhelmed by normal challenges.
- **Creativity tanks.** The brain needs sleep to make novel connections. When you're exhausted, you default to the familiar.
- **Memory consolidation fails.** That thing you learned in yesterday's meeting? Your tired brain didn't store it properly.

The Cortisol Connection

Cortisol is your body's primary stress hormone. When you are sleep-deprived, your cortisol levels are elevated. Your toddler,

who is also sleep-deprived, is also running on high cortisol.

Stress is literally contagious. Your child can sense your tension. They pick up on your frustration, your anxiety, your short fuse. This makes them more anxious and less able to sleep—which makes you more stressed—which they sense—and the cycle continues.

Breaking this cycle requires addressing BOTH your child's sleep AND your own stress levels. You can't just fix one.

Strategic Sleep: Quality Over Quantity

If you can't get the quantity of sleep you need (and during a regression, you often can't), you must maximize the quality of the sleep you DO get.

- Keep your bedroom cool, dark, and quiet
- Avoid screens for 30 minutes before bed (yes, even when you're exhausted)
- Limit caffeine after 2 PM (it stays in your system longer than you think)
- Avoid alcohol as a sleep aid—it disrupts sleep quality
- When you do get to sleep, make it count: earplugs, eye mask, whatever helps
- Take the first shift or the second shift—but not both (split with partner)
- On rough nights, prioritize sleep over everything except true emergencies

The Power Nap

If you have any opportunity to nap—lunch break, commute (not while driving!), early arrival at daycare pickup—take it. A 20-minute nap can restore alertness and performance. Set an alarm for 25 minutes and don't feel guilty.

Redefining 'Having It All'

Before we dive into the practical strategies, let's address the elephant in the room: guilt. Working parent guilt is real, it's pervasive, and it will sabotage your sleep training efforts if you don't address it head-on.

The Guilt Trap

Here's how guilt sabotages sleep:

You feel guilty for being away at work all day. When you get home, your child is clingy and demanding. You feel even more guilty. When bedtime comes, they resist—and you give in because you want to maximize your time together. You lie with them until they fall asleep. You answer every call for water, every request for 'one more hug.' You can't bear to hear them cry because you already feel like a bad parent for working.

The result? Your child doesn't learn to fall asleep independently. Bedtime takes forever. Night wakings multiply. Everyone sleeps worse. You're more exhausted. You're more irritable. Your limited time together is worse quality. You feel more guilty.

This is the guilt trap, and it's a cycle you have to break.

Reframing the Narrative

Try these reframes:

- OLD: 'I should spend every possible moment with my child.'
- NEW: 'Quality connection matters more than quantity. 15

minutes of full presence beats 2 hours of exhausted, distracted half-presence.'

- OLD: 'Good parents don't let their children cry.' NEW: 'Good parents teach their children skills—including the skill of self-soothing.'
- OLD: 'I should be able to handle this without help.' NEW: 'It takes a village. Asking for help is smart parenting, not failure.'
- OLD: 'My child's sleep problems are my fault for working.' NEW: 'Sleep regressions happen to ALL children, regardless of their parents' work status.'

Permission to Be 'Good Enough'

This is your permission slip: **You do not have to be perfect.**

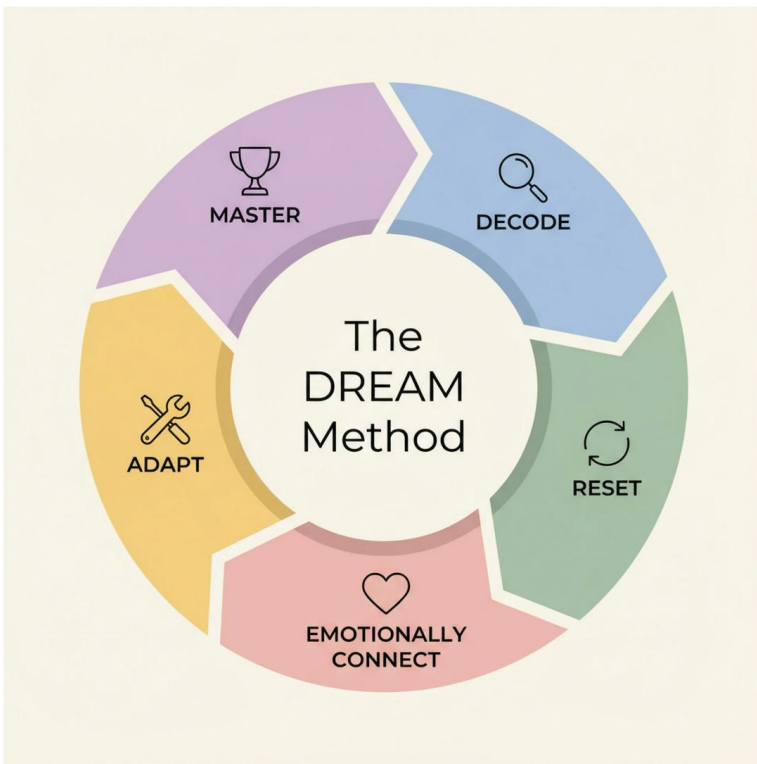
You don't have to nail bedtime every single night. You don't have to respond perfectly to every wake-up. You don't have to have a spotless house, home-cooked meals, and a rising career while also being a serene, patient, fully-rested parent.

Good enough is good enough. Aim for 80% consistency. Aim for most nights going reasonably well. Aim for gradual improvement, not overnight transformation.

That's what this guide will help you achieve.

PART TWO

The DREAM Method for Busy Parents



The DREAM Method Framework

The DREAM Method works for working parents too—with some important adaptations:

D - Decode your challenges (including guilt, time, and partner issues)

R - Reset routines that work with YOUR schedule

E - Emotionally Connect in high-impact, time-efficient ways

A - Adapt for business travel, late nights, and real life

M - Master sustainable sleep (not perfect sleep)

Chapter 4

D is for Decode

For working parents, decoding isn't just about your child's sleep patterns—it's about understanding the full picture of your family's life, including work schedules, stress levels, and who's really doing what.

The Working Parent's Sleep Audit

Use the Working Parent Sleep Audit in Chapter 11. This isn't just about tracking your child's sleep—it includes sections for tracking YOUR sleep, your work hours, your stress levels, and your partner's involvement.

This holistic view is crucial. Sometimes the solution isn't a new bedtime strategy—it's getting your partner to do the 3 AM wake-ups, or adjusting your work schedule, or admitting you need more help.

Identify Your Primary Hurdle

Be brutally honest: What is the biggest obstacle standing in your way?

Type 1: The Guilt-Ridden Parent

You feel so guilty for being at work that you give in to every demand at night. You can't bear the thought of your child being upset when you've already 'abandoned' them all day. **Your primary challenge:** Letting go of guilt and setting loving boundaries.

Type 2: The Time-Crunched Parent

You get home late, evenings are a chaotic rush, and there's no time for a lengthy bedtime routine. By the time you walk in the door, you have maybe 90 minutes until bedtime. **Your primary challenge:** Creating a streamlined, high-connection routine that fits your schedule.

Type 3: The Solo Parent (Even If You're Partnered)

Whether you're actually single or just feel like you're doing this alone, you don't have reliable backup. Your partner isn't on the same page, works different hours, or is simply not stepping up. **Your primary challenge:** Getting support and creating a plan you can execute by yourself if needed.

Setting a Realistic Goal

Guilt-Ridden Parent: 'My goal is to stick to our sleep plan for three nights in a row without giving in to guilt.'

Time-Crunched Parent: 'My goal is to create a 30-minute Connection-First bedtime routine and implement it every weeknight this week.'

Solo Parent: 'My goal is to have a direct conversation with my partner about sharing night wakings, OR to arrange for one night of backup help this week.'

R is for Reset

Resetting your routine when you have limited time and energy requires ruthless efficiency—and a focus on what actually matters.

The Connection-First Bedtime Routine

If you get home from work just before bedtime, the temptation is to rush through the routine to get your child to bed so you can finally rest. This is a mistake.

Your child has missed you all day. They need to connect with you before they can separate from you for the night. Rushing creates resistance. Connection creates cooperation.

Here's a routine designed for working parents:

Time	Activity
Walk in door	Phone goes AWAY. Not on silent—away.
0-15 minutes	THE RECONNECT: 15 minutes of uninterrupted, child-led time. S
15-20 min	Quick dinner/snack if needed (keep it simple)
20-30 min	Bath or wash-up (can be connecting time too)
30-35 min	Pajamas and teeth
35-45 min	2 books in bed + cuddle time
45 min	Lights out, goodnight phrase, leave

The 15-Minute Reconnect is non-negotiable. It fills their connection tank so they can let you go at bedtime.

The Weekend Reset

The weekend is your secret weapon. If you're starting a new sleep approach, start it on Friday night. This gives you two full days and nights to be consistent without the pressure of having to be sharp for work the next day.

Use weekends to:

- Catch up on YOUR sleep (take turns sleeping in)
- Implement new bedtime strategies when you're not exhausted
- Reset after a rough week
- Get back on schedule after travel or illness

Childcare Collaboration

Your child's sleep will never be consistent if their daytime schedule is all over the place. You need your childcare provider on the same page.

Use the Childcare Communication Template in Chapter 11 to have a clear conversation about:

- Desired nap times and duration
- What to do if your child won't nap
- Wake windows and sleepy cues
- Consistency with your home approach
- Communication about how naps went each day



Consistency between home and childcare matters

E is for Emotionally Connect

For working parents, emotional connection is about quality over quantity. You don't need hours of playtime to fill your child's connection cup—you need intentional, focused moments.

High-Impact Connection Activities

These activities pack maximum connection into minimum time:

- **The 15-Minute Reconnect:** The moment you walk in the door, give your child 15 minutes of uninterrupted, phone-free, child-led attention. Get on their level. Follow their lead. This is not optional.
- **Special Time:** 10 minutes of one-on-one time where your child chooses the activity and leads the play. No teaching, no correcting, just presence.
- **Rose and Thorn:** At dinner, everyone shares their 'rose' (best part of the day) and 'thorn' (hardest part). This builds emotional vocabulary and helps you connect with their inner world.
- **The Bedtime Briefing:** During books or cuddles, ask: 'What made you happy today? What made you sad? What are you excited about tomorrow?'
- **Physical Connection:** Hugs, cuddles, back rubs, playing with their hair. Touch releases oxytocin for both of you.

Managing YOUR Stress

Your child is a mirror. If you walk in the door stressed, frantic, and distracted, they will reflect that energy back at you. Bedtime will be harder.

You need a strategy to decompress BEFORE you walk in the door:

- Sit in your car for 5 minutes before going inside. Breathe. Let work go.
- Listen to a calming podcast or music on your commute home
- Do a brief meditation or breathing exercise (apps like Calm or Headspace have 5-minute options)
- Text your partner to vent BEFORE you get home, not after
- Change out of work clothes immediately—it's a physical signal to shift modes

The Handoff

The transition from childcare to home can be chaotic and set a negative tone for the whole evening. Create a smooth 'handoff' routine:

- Get a brief report from your caregiver before they leave (how naps went, any issues)
- Have a transition snack ready—hunger causes meltdowns
- Keep the first 15 minutes low-key (no errands, no rushing)
- Acknowledge the transition: 'I missed you today. I'm so happy to see you.'
- Let them show you something or tell you something before you do anything else



Quality connection fills the tank

A is for Adapt

Life as a working parent is unpredictable. You need a sleep plan with built-in flexibility for business trips, late nights at the office, and the general chaos of real life.

Handling Business Travel

Business travel is inevitable for many working parents. Here's how to minimize the sleep disruption:

- **Before you go:** Record yourself reading your child's favorite bedtime books. They can watch/listen to you during the bedtime routine.
- **While you're away:** FaceTime for a quick goodnight if time zones allow, but keep it short and early in the routine—not right at bedtime when it can cause tears.
- **Have your partner/caregiver maintain the routine.** Consistency with a different person is better than inconsistency with you.
- **When you return:** Expect some clinginess and possible sleep disruption. Don't take it personally. Return to your consistent routine immediately.

Late Nights at the Office

When you know you'll be home late:

- Tell your child in the morning: 'I have to work late tonight, but [partner/caregiver] will do bedtime. I'll come kiss you when I get home.'

- Have the at-home parent stick to the routine as much as possible
- If you get home before they're asleep, keep your visit SHORT—a quick kiss and 'I love you, go to sleep'
- Don't restart the routine because you're home—that rewards waiting up

The 'Good Enough' Mindset

Perfection is the enemy of progress. Your sleep plan will not be executed perfectly every single night, and that's okay.

Aim for 80% consistency. If you're consistent 80% of the time, you'll see results. The other 20% is life happening.

On the nights that go sideways, don't spiral. Don't beat yourself up. Just get back on track the next night. One rough night doesn't undo your progress. Giving up does.

Building Your Support Village

You cannot do this completely alone. You need at least one person you can call on for backup.

- Your partner (have a direct conversation about sharing the load)
- A grandparent who can take one night a week
- A friend who can swap 'sleep-in mornings' with you
- A paid babysitter for one evening so you can catch up on rest
- A postpartum doula or night nurse for the worst of the regression

Even if your 'village' is just one person who can help once a week,
that one morning of sleeping in can make a world of difference.

Chapter 8

M is for Master

Mastery for working parents isn't about having perfect sleep every night. It's about having a sustainable system that works with your life—not against it.

Your Sustainable Sleep Plan

Create a one-page plan that captures your family's sleep system. Include:

- Standard weeknight routine (with times)
- Plan for nights you're home late
- Plan for nights your partner is home late
- Weekend approach
- How to handle travel
- Who handles which wake-ups
- Your backup person and when to call them
- Your 'break glass in case of emergency' plan

The Sunday Night Scaries

If your child's sleep is consistently worst on Sunday night, they may be sensing your anxiety about the upcoming work week. This is extremely common.

How to address it:

- Check YOUR anxiety levels on Sunday evening. Your child feels it.

- Do something calming and connecting on Sunday afternoon
- Keep Sunday bedtime routine exactly the same as other nights
- Don't discuss the work week in front of your child on Sunday evening
- Consider a slightly earlier bedtime to offset any anxiety-related difficulty

From Surviving to Thriving

Here's the truth: When your child sleeps, you can sleep. When you sleep, you are a better employee, a better parent, and a healthier human.

You are more focused. More creative. More resilient. More patient. More present.

Investing in your child's sleep is one of the best investments you can make in your career, your family, and yourself. It's not selfish to prioritize sleep—it's strategic.



You've got this

Real Family Success Stories

CASE STUDY: The Lawyer Mom

The Scenario: Sarah was a litigation attorney with unpredictable hours. Her 18-month-old was waking 4-5 times a night, and Sarah was barely functioning at work. She was making mistakes she'd never made before.

The Challenge: Sarah felt so guilty about her long hours that she couldn't bring herself to let her daughter cry. She was also the default parent for all night wakings because her husband 'had to be fresh for work'—as if she didn't.

The Solution: First, Sarah had a direct conversation with her husband: 'My job matters too. We split nights.' He took Sunday-Wednesday nights; she took Thursday-Saturday. Then she implemented the DREAM method on her nights, starting on a Friday. Her husband did the same. Within two weeks, her daughter was sleeping through.

The Outcome: Sarah's work performance bounced back within a month. She was sharper, more confident, and no longer running on fumes. Her daughter was happier during the day too.

Key Lesson: *Your sleep matters as much as your partner's. Split the load.*

CASE STUDY: The Single Dad

The Scenario: Marcus was a single father working full-time. His 2-year-old son was going through a brutal regression, and Marcus had no backup. He was averaging 4 hours of broken sleep and his job was suffering.

The Challenge: Marcus had no partner to share the load and limited family nearby. He was trying to do everything alone and was burning out.

The Solution: Marcus reached out to his parents, who lived an hour away, and asked for help one night a week. His mom started coming every Wednesday to do bedtime and handle night wakings while Marcus slept. He also hired a babysitter for Saturday mornings so he could sleep in. Finally, he implemented a strict bedtime routine that didn't require him to lie with his son.

The Outcome: The regular sleep on Wednesday nights and Saturday mornings gave Marcus enough recovery to handle the rest of the week. Within a month, his son's sleep improved significantly, and Marcus felt human again.

Key Lesson: *Asking for help is not weakness—it's survival. Find your village.*

CASE STUDY: The Healthcare Worker

The Scenario: Nina was a nurse working 12-hour shifts, three days a week. Her schedule was chaotic, and her toddler's sleep had become equally chaotic. Bedtime ranged from 6 PM to 9 PM depending on Nina's schedule.

The Challenge: The inconsistent schedule was confusing for Nina's daughter. She never knew what to expect, and her sleep reflected that chaos.

The Solution: Nina and her husband created TWO routines: a 'Nina nights' routine and a 'Dad nights' routine. Both ended the same way (same goodnight phrase, same lovey, same white noise), but the timing was different based on who was home. They posted both schedules on the fridge so everyone knew the plan.

The Outcome: Having two consistent routines (instead of no consistent routine) made all the difference. Nina's daughter learned to adapt to who was putting her to bed, and the consistency within each routine helped her settle.

Key Lesson: *Consistency doesn't mean identical. It means predictable.*

CASE STUDY: The Business Traveler

The Scenario: James traveled internationally for work about once a month, sometimes for a week at a time. Every time he returned, his 3-year-old's sleep fell apart. It took a week to recover, and then he'd travel again.

The Challenge: The constant disruption was preventing any real progress. His daughter was confused and clingy, and his wife was exhausted from handling everything alone.

The Solution: James recorded videos of himself reading his daughter's favorite bedtime books. During trips, his wife played a 'daddy story' every night as part of the routine. James FaceTimed briefly before dinner (not at bedtime). When he returned, he did NOT take over bedtime immediately—his wife continued for one more night while James did a low-key reconnect. Then he transitioned back in.

The Outcome: The transitions became much smoother. His daughter felt connected to James even when he was away, and she didn't experience the dramatic disruption of 'daddy's back!' at bedtime.

Key Lesson: *Maintain presence even when absent, and transition back gradually.*

CASE STUDY: The Guilt-Ridden Mom

The Scenario: Rachel was a marketing executive who felt crushing guilt about working full-time. To compensate, she never said no to her toddler, especially at bedtime. Bedtime took 2+ hours every night.

The Challenge: Rachel's guilt was driving her to overcompensate at night, which was making everyone's sleep worse—including hers.

The Solution: Rachel worked with a therapist on the guilt (important!). She reframed her thinking: 'My job provides for my family and models ambition for my daughter.' She implemented the Connection-First routine, with 15 focused minutes when she walked in the door, followed by a firm but loving bedtime. She repeated to herself: 'Setting boundaries is loving.'

The Outcome: Bedtime went from 2+ hours to 45 minutes within two weeks. Rachel felt less guilty because her time with her daughter was higher quality. And she got her evenings back.

Key Lesson: *Guilt drives overcompensation. Address the guilt, not just the sleep.*

PART THREE

Practical Tools & Resources

Chapter 9

Week-by-Week Action Plan

Week 1: Decode & Prepare

Day 1-2: Complete the Working Parent Sleep Audit. Track your child's sleep, your sleep, your work hours, and your stress levels.

Day 3: Identify your type (Guilt-Ridden, Time-Crunched, or Solo). Set your goal.

Day 4-5: Have conversations with your partner and/or childcare provider about the plan.

Day 6-7: Prepare for implementation: set up the bedroom, practice the new routine language, line up any support.

Week 2: Reset & Connect (Start Friday!)

Friday night: Implement new routine. This gives you the weekend to be consistent.

Saturday-Sunday: Stay consistent. This is your reset window.

Monday-Thursday: Implement the Connection-First routine on work days.

Daily: The 15-minute reconnect is non-negotiable.

Week 3: Adapt & Troubleshoot

Day 15-17: Assess progress. What's working? What needs adjustment?

Day 18-19: Address any lingering issues (partner coordination, childcare consistency).

Day 20-21: Refine your routine based on what you've learned.

Week 4: Master & Maintain

Day 22-24: Create your Sustainable Sleep Plan document.

Day 25-27: Practice your 'disruption protocols' (what to do when you travel, work late, etc.).

Day 28: Evaluate overall progress. Celebrate wins. Plan for ongoing maintenance.

Troubleshooting Guide

My partner won't help with night wakings

Have a direct conversation during the day (not at 3 AM). Use 'I' statements: 'I need help. I can't perform at work on this little sleep.' Propose a specific split (alternating nights, splitting the week). If they won't budge, this is a relationship issue beyond sleep training—consider couples counseling.

My childcare provider won't follow the nap schedule

First, check if your expectations are realistic—daycare can't always guarantee specific nap times. Focus on what they CAN control: a consistent nap environment, not letting your child sleep past a certain time, communicating how naps went. If they truly won't cooperate, you may need to find different childcare.

I feel too guilty to let my child cry

Remember: You're not doing this TO your child—you're doing this FOR your child. Sleep is a biological need. Teaching them to sleep is as important as teaching them to eat healthy food. Some short-term tears lead to long-term better sleep for everyone. If guilt is overwhelming, consider working with a therapist.

I'm too exhausted to be consistent

Start on a weekend when you have more reserves. Ask for help—even one night of backup sleep can restore your ability to be consistent. Lower your standards temporarily in other areas (housework, cooking) to conserve energy for sleep training. This is a sprint, not a marathon—a few hard weeks now means better sleep for months to come.

My child sleeps terribly after I travel

This is normal. Don't panic. Return to your consistent routine immediately. Expect 2-3 days of adjustment. Don't create new habits (lying with them, bringing them to your bed) just because you feel guilty about traveling. Consistency is the fastest path back to normal.

Sunday nights are always the worst

Your child may be sensing your Monday anxiety. Check your own stress levels. Do something calming and connecting on Sunday afternoon. Keep Sunday bedtime exactly like other nights. Consider a slightly earlier bedtime.

Chapter 11

Printable Templates & Worksheets

Working Parent Sleep Audit

Instructions: Track for 48 hours. Include YOUR data, not just your child's.

Day 1 - Date: _____

Your Child:

Nap: Start _____ End _____ Quality (1-5): _____

Bedtime routine start: _____ In bed: _____ Asleep: _____

Night wakings: Times _____ Who handled? _____

Morning wake: _____

YOU:

Work hours today: _____ to _____

Time you got home: _____

Your stress level (1-10): _____

Hours of sleep you got: _____

How you felt at work (1-10): _____

Partner involvement:

Who did bedtime? _____

Who handled night wakings? _____

Notes: _____

Day 2 - Date: _____

Your Child:

Nap: Start _____ End _____ Quality (1-5): _____

Bedtime routine start: _____ In bed: _____ Asleep: _____

Night wakings: Times _____ Who handled? _____

Morning wake: _____

YOU:

Work hours today: _____ to _____

Time you got home: _____

Your stress level (1-10): _____

Hours of sleep you got: _____

How you felt at work (1-10): _____

Partner involvement:

Who did bedtime? _____

Who handled night wakings? _____

Notes: _____

Working Parent Type Assessment

Instructions: Check all that apply to identify your primary hurdle.

THE GUILT-RIDDEN PARENT

- ☐ I feel guilty about working and being away from my child
- ☐ I have trouble saying 'no' to my child at bedtime
- ☐ I can't bear to hear my child cry
- ☐ I overcompensate at night for being gone during the day
- ☐ I lie with my child until they fall asleep
- ☐ I answer every request, even after lights out

TOTAL: _____

THE TIME-CRUNCHED PARENT

- ☐ I get home less than 2 hours before bedtime
- ☐ Evenings feel rushed and chaotic
- ☐ I don't have time for a long bedtime routine
- ☐ I often feel like I'm racing the clock
- ☐ My child is often already tired when I get home
- ☐ I sacrifice connection time to 'get things done'

TOTAL: _____

THE SOLO PARENT

- ☐ I handle most or all night wakings alone
- ☐ My partner is not on the same page about sleep
- ☐ I am a single parent
- ☐ I feel like I'm doing this without support
- ☐ My partner works different hours or travels frequently
- ☐ I have no reliable backup when I'm at my limit

TOTAL: _____

Primary type: _____

My specific goal:

Connection-First Routine Template

Instructions: Fill in based on your schedule. Post where you'll see it.

I typically get home at: _____

My Connection-First Routine:

- _____ Walk in door - phone goes AWAY
- _____ 15-minute reconnect (activity: _____)
- _____ Quick dinner/snack
- _____ Bath/wash-up
- _____ Pajamas and teeth
- _____ Books in bed (how many: _____)
- _____ Lights out

Our goodnight phrase: _____

If I'm home late, the backup plan is:

My stress reset before walking in the door:

Childcare Sleep Communication Template

Instructions: Share with daycare/nanny. Keep a copy for yourself.

Child's name: _____

Date: _____

Our Sleep Goals:

Desired nap time: _____ to _____

Maximum nap length: _____

Please wake by: _____

Sleepy Cues to Watch For:

☐ Rubbing eyes ☐ Yawning ☐ Fussiness ☐ Zoning out

☐ Other: _____

Nap Routine:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

If child won't nap:

Please communicate daily:

☐ Nap start/end times ☐ Nap quality ☐ Any issues

Best way to communicate: _____

Parent signature: _____ Date: _____

Our Sustainable Sleep Plan

Instructions: Complete as a family. Review monthly.

Standard Schedule:

Target bedtime: _____ Target wake time: _____

Who does what:

Bedtime routine: _____ (Mon-Fri) / _____
(weekends)

Night wakings: _____ (Sun-Wed) / _____
(Thu-Sat)

When I'm home late:

When my partner is home late:

When I travel:

Our backup support person:

Name: _____ Phone: _____

When to call them: _____

Our 'break glass in emergency' plan:

We agree to be 80% consistent and not beat ourselves up about the other 20%.

Parent 1 signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent 2 signature: _____ Date: _____

Partner Conversation Guide

Use this guide to have a productive conversation about sharing sleep responsibilities.

Opening (use 'I' statements):

'I've been struggling with sleep deprivation, and it's affecting my work/health/mood.'

'I need help. I can't keep doing all the night wakings alone.'

Share the data:

Show your Working Parent Sleep Audit

'Look at how many hours I'm getting vs. how many you're getting.'

Propose a specific plan:

'I'd like to try splitting the week. You take Sun-Wed nights, I take Thu-Sat.'

'Or we could alternate nights.'

Address objections:

'I have to be fresh for work' → 'So do I. My job matters too.'

'You're better at it' → 'You can learn. I did.'

'I don't hear them' → 'Use a baby monitor on your nightstand.'

Agree on a trial period:

'Let's try this for two weeks and see how it goes.'

Write down what you agreed to:

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: I only have 30 minutes between getting home and bedtime. Is that enough?

A: It's tight, but yes. Focus on the 15-minute reconnect—that's the priority. Keep the rest streamlined: quick wash-up, pajamas, one book, bed. Quality matters more than quantity. A connected 30 minutes beats a distracted 2 hours.

Q: My partner thinks sleep training is cruel. How do I get them on board?

A: Share the research on the importance of sleep for child development and the lack of evidence for long-term harm from sleep training. Frame it as teaching a skill, not abandonment. Start with gentler methods if that helps. Ultimately, you both need to agree on an approach you can be consistent with.

Q: I travel frequently for work. Is it even worth trying to sleep train?

A: Yes. Consistency at home 70-80% of the time still helps. Have a solid plan for when you're away (recorded stories, consistent routine with other caregiver). Accept that there will be adjustment periods when you return, but a solid baseline makes recovery faster.

Q: Should I quit my job to fix my child's sleep?

A: No. Sleep regressions happen to all children, regardless of whether their parents work. Your career provides financial security, role modeling, and fulfillment. The solution is better systems, support, and boundaries—not eliminating one of the most important parts of your identity.

Q: How do I handle daycare messing up the nap schedule?

A: First, accept that daycare can't always control individual nap timing. Focus on what they CAN do: consistent environment, not letting your child nap past a certain time, keeping you informed. If naps are consistently problematic, move bedtime earlier on bad nap days.

Q: I'm a single parent with no support. How do I survive this?

A: First, look harder for support—even an hour of help matters. Can a friend take your child for one Saturday morning? Can a neighbor do one evening? Second, accept that your approach may be slower and gentler out of necessity. Third, consider hiring help (mother's helper, babysitter) even occasionally. Fourth, be very gentle with yourself.

More Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How do I stop feeling guilty about working?

A: This is a big question that may benefit from therapy. For now: remember that working provides for your family, models ambition and independence for your child, and fulfills part of who you are. Your child doesn't need more of you—they need the best of you. Better sleep (for both of you) makes that possible.

Q: My child only wants me at bedtime, not my partner. What do we do?

A: This is common, especially if you've been the primary bedtime person. Your partner needs to DO bedtimes consistently to become good at it. Expect some tears. Leave the house if needed (go for a walk, sit in your car). Your child will adapt. Your partner will gain confidence. You will get a break.

Q: Should I sleep train during a busy season at work?

A: If possible, start during a calmer period or begin on a long weekend. But don't wait forever for the 'perfect' time—it may never come. If your busy season is several months long, start anyway. A few hard weeks now is better than months more of bad sleep.

Q: How long until I see results?

A: Most families see significant improvement within 1-2 weeks of consistent implementation. Full resolution of a regression typically

takes 2-4 weeks. But you should see SOME improvement within the first few days if you're being consistent.

References & Further Reading

Cited Sources

[1] Williamson, A. M., & Feyer, A. M. (2000). Moderate sleep deprivation produces impairments in cognitive and motor performance equivalent to legally prescribed levels of alcohol intoxication. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 57(10), 649-655.

[2] Mindell, J. A., & Williamson, A. A. (2018). Benefits of a bedtime routine in young children: Sleep, development, and beyond. *Sleep Medicine Reviews*, 40, 93-108.

[3] Meltzer, L. J., & Mindell, J. A. (2014). Systematic review and meta-analysis of behavioral interventions for pediatric insomnia. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 39(8), 932-948.

[4] Price, A. M., et al. (2012). Five-year follow-up of harms and benefits of behavioral infant sleep intervention. *Pediatrics*, 130(4), 643-651.

Recommended Resources

Books:

- *Drop the Ball* by Tiffany Dufu (on letting go of perfectionism)
- *Fair Play* by Eve Rodsky (on dividing household labor)

- How to Keep House While Drowning by KC Davis (on functional approaches to home management)

For Guilt:

- Consider therapy, especially Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Look for working parent support groups in your area or online

A Final Word

You picked up this book because you're struggling. You're exhausted. You're trying to be everything to everyone and feeling like you're failing at all of it.

Here's what I want you to know: **You are not failing.** You are doing an incredibly hard thing—raising a child while maintaining a career—and you're doing it on broken sleep. The fact that you're still standing is a testament to your strength.

Sleep deprivation makes everything feel impossible. It distorts your thinking, amplifies your guilt, and drains your reserves. But it is temporary. This regression will pass. Your child will sleep. You will sleep. Things will get better.

In the meantime, be gentle with yourself. Aim for good enough, not perfect. Ask for help. Let some things go. Prioritize sleep—yours and your child's—because everything else becomes easier when you're rested.

You are doing important work, both at your job and at home. Your child is lucky to have a parent who cares so much that they're reading books about sleep at probably 2 AM.

Now put this book down and get some rest.

You've got this.

Marli Benjamin

www.thesleepregressionsolution.com

Pinterest: @sleepregressionsolution

About the Author

Marli Benjamin is a mother of two who survived the 18-month sleep regression twice—the first time completely unprepared, the second time with hard-won knowledge and a lot more grace.

She worked full-time through both regressions, navigating the impossible balance of conference calls and night wakings, deadlines and meltdowns. This guide is everything she wishes someone had given her when she was running on three hours of broken sleep and trying to lead a meeting.

She's not a doctor or a sleep scientist. She's a mum who figured it out the hard way and wants to make it easier for you.

For more resources and support:

www.thesleepregressionsolution.com

Pinterest: @sleepregressionsolution

Working Parent Self-Care Checklist

Taking care of yourself isn't selfish—it's necessary. Check what you'll commit to this week.

Sleep Hygiene:

- Keep my bedroom cool, dark, and quiet
- No screens 30 minutes before bed
- No caffeine after 2 PM
- Go to bed within 30 minutes of the same time each night

Daily Sanity:

- 5 minutes of decompression before walking in the door
- Put my phone away during the reconnect time
- Eat at least one real meal
- Drink enough water

Weekly Recovery:

- One morning to sleep in (arranged with partner/support)
- One activity just for me (even 30 minutes)
- One conversation with an adult friend

Emergency Self-Care:

When I'm at my limit, I will: _____

My backup person I can call: _____



You can't pour from an empty cup

Scripts for Common Situations

Exact phrases to use when you're too tired to think

When you walk in the door and they're clingy:

'I missed you SO much today. I'm going to put my bag down and then I want to hear all about your day. Show me your favorite thing from today.'

When you feel guilty about being firm at bedtime:

Remind yourself: 'I'm teaching my child an important skill. Setting boundaries is loving.'

When your partner says 'You're better at bedtime':

'Practice makes perfect. You'll get better at it. Tonight is your night.'

When your child cries for you while your partner does bedtime:

Stay out of sight. Text your partner: 'You've got this. Don't come get me unless it's a safety issue.'

When you're too exhausted to do the routine:

'Tonight is going to be quick but still special. We're doing jammies, teeth, one book, and cuddles. What book do you choose?'

When asking your boss for flexibility:

'I'm dealing with a temporary sleep issue at home. For the next two weeks, I may need to start 30 minutes late or work from home occasionally. I'll ensure my work gets done.'

When someone judges your parenting choices:

'Thanks for your input. We're doing what works for our family.'

When you feel like you're failing:

'Say out loud: 'I am doing a hard thing. It's temporary. I am a good parent.'

More Success Stories

CASE STUDY: The Shift Worker

The Scenario: Maria was a nurse working rotating 12-hour shifts. Her schedule changed weekly, and her toddler's bedtime was handled by different people on different nights. Sleep was chaotic for everyone.

The Challenge: No one person was consistently doing bedtime, and each caregiver had a different approach. The toddler never knew what to expect.

The Solution: Maria created a written bedtime routine that EVERYONE followed—herself, her husband, and her mother-in-law who helped out. She posted it on the door. Same steps, same order, same goodnight phrase, no matter who was doing it.

The Outcome: Within two weeks, her toddler's bedtime resistance dropped dramatically. He knew what to expect, regardless of who was putting him to bed. Maria felt less guilty on her work nights because she knew he was getting consistency.

Key Lesson: *The routine itself is the anchor—not the person doing it.*

CASE STUDY: The Perfectionist Executive

The Scenario: Amanda was a VP at a tech company who approached parenting the same way she approached work: with perfectionism and high expectations. When her 2-year-old's sleep fell apart, Amanda saw it as a problem to solve perfectly.

The Challenge: Amanda was reading every sleep book, trying every method, and switching approaches every few days when things didn't work immediately. Her perfectionism was preventing consistency.

The Solution: Amanda's therapist helped her see that 'good enough' had to become her new standard. She picked ONE approach, committed to it for two full weeks, and stopped researching. She accepted that some nights would be terrible.

The Outcome: The two-week commitment to consistency worked. Not perfectly—but well enough. Amanda also noticed her overall stress dropped when she stopped trying to optimize every aspect of parenting.

Key Lesson: *Perfectionism sabotages sleep training. Pick an approach and stick with it.*

CASE STUDY: The Remote Worker Boundary Struggle

The Scenario: Since COVID, Kevin worked from home full-time while his partner went to an office. His 18-month-old was home with a nanny, but the toddler knew daddy was 'right there' and had meltdowns wanting to see him. Naps were impossible.

The Challenge: The toddler couldn't understand why daddy was home but unavailable. This caused stress for Kevin, the nanny, and the toddler.

The Solution: Kevin started 'going to work'—he walked out the front door with his bag, said goodbye, and then came in the back door to his home office. He stayed invisible and inaudible during work hours. Nap time was strictly during his meeting-heavy afternoon block.

The Outcome: Within a week, the toddler accepted that 'daddy is at work.' Naps improved dramatically. Kevin stopped feeling guilty every time he heard fussing, because the toddler was no longer fussing for HIM.

Key Lesson: *Physical boundaries help toddlers understand 'available' vs 'unavailable'—even if you're technically in the same building.*

Time-Saving Hacks for Working Parents

- **Prep the night before:** Lay out clothes, pack bags, prep breakfast ingredients. Morning chaos affects evening patience.
- **Batch cook on Sundays:** Having easy dinners ready means less stress when you walk in the door.
- **Lower your standards:** Good-enough dinner is fine. Not-spotless house is fine. Kids in yesterday's outfit is fine.
- **Say no to things:** Every optional commitment you decline is energy saved for what matters.
- **Outsource what you can:** Grocery delivery, cleaning service, laundry service—if you can afford it, it's worth it during the regression.
- **Use your commute:** Listen to audiobooks or podcasts. Decompress. Don't do more work.
- **Two-minute tasks:** If something takes less than 2 minutes, do it now. It prevents pile-up.
- **Phone-free zone:** Put your phone in a drawer when you walk in the door. You'll be more present and the reconnect time will be higher quality.
- **Simplify the bedtime routine:** Three steps is fine. Five is fine. Fifteen is too many.
- **Accept help:** When someone offers, say yes. Don't be a martyr.

Quick Reference Card

Cut this out and keep it on your fridge

THE CONNECTION-FIRST ROUTINE

1. Phone AWAY when you walk in
2. 15-minute reconnect (their choice)
3. Streamlined routine (20-30 min)
4. Firm but loving goodbye

WHEN YOU'RE AT YOUR LIMIT

- It's okay to not be okay
- Tag your partner if possible
- Put child in safe space, step away, breathe
- Call your backup person
- Tomorrow is a new day

REMINDER

80% consistency is success
You are doing a hard thing
Sleep deprivation is temporary

Notes

Notes

Notes

Sleep Log - Week 1

Monday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Tuesday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Wednesday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Thursday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Friday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Saturday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Sunday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Week 1 Wins: _____

Week 1 Challenges: _____

Sleep Log - Week 2

Monday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Tuesday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Wednesday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Thursday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Friday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Saturday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Sunday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Week 2 Wins: _____

Week 2 Challenges: _____

Sleep Log - Week 3

Monday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Tuesday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Wednesday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Thursday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Friday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Saturday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Sunday Date: _____

Child: Nap _____ Bed _____ Wakings _____ | Me: Hours slept _____ Stress (1-10) _____

Week 3 Wins: _____

Week 3 Challenges: _____