

Southern Tier Health Care System, Inc. – Promoting Safe Sleep: Roles for Community-based Organizations

SOUTHERN TIER HEALTH CARE SYSTEM



Our agency has done a lot of work to promote safe sleep in our region. The first document included here is an overview of the steps that our organization has taken as a community-based organization to lead safe sleep efforts in the region. The second is a copy of the safe sleep policy that was adopted by Olean General Hospital following their participation in the OCFS Hospital Safe Sleep Project as they worked to achieve Cribs for Kids Safe Sleep Hospital Certification at the gold level. The last document is a set of visuals that our agency uses when educating parents about the ABCs of safe sleep. Especially when we are having conversations about recommendations such as room sharing or use of sleep sacks to reduce the risk of loose blankets, we find it helpful to have clear visuals to refer to.



Promoting Safe Sleep: Roles for Community-Based Organizations

Background

As a nonprofit rural health care network with a mission to improve the health and wellness of the residents of southwestern New York, Southern Tier Health Care System (STHCS) has actively worked to promote infant safe sleep. The organization became aware of the critical importance of using a multi-faceted approach to address unsafe sleep fatalities in the Western New York region through the CEO's involvement in the Health Foundation for Western and Central New York's Health Leadership Fellows Program.

In its unique role as a community-based organization, STHCS has led regional safe sleep efforts and formed effective partnerships with health care providers to implement safe sleep initiatives. The ultimate goal of STHCS' safe sleep initiatives is to increase the proportion of the population adhering to the American Academy of Pediatrics' safe sleep recommendations and to decrease SIDS/SUID deaths. STHCS has used a multi-faceted approach to impact the infant sleep practices of parents and caregivers. The approach emphasizes collaborative partnerships between STHCS and agencies who provide direct services for infants and their parents and caregivers.

We have found the following actions have allowed us to maximize our impact.

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Become a Cribs for Kids Partner

- To help low-income parents without the means to create a safe sleep environment for their newborns, Southern Tier Health Care System became a Cribs for Kids Partner in February of 2016. [Cribs for Kids](#), a national organization dedicated to safe sleep, works to prevent infant deaths by educating parents and caregivers on the importance of practicing safe sleep and by providing portable cribs to families who cannot afford to create a safe place for their babies to sleep. Since the Cribs for Kids program at STHCS began, the program has trained over 400 parents and caregivers in the ABCs of safe sleep and provided over 300 portable cribs to low income families. This is a keystone of STHCS' safe sleep initiatives. It allows STHCS as a community-based organization to stay actively involved in providing solutions and engaging in concrete action to support its partners.
- Provide robust, individualized training to families that receive a free portable crib through the Cribs for Kids program. Staff who provide cribs to parents and caregivers must engage the recipients in conversation-based education in a non-judgmental manner. Parents should have ample time and opportunity to ask questions, express concerns and learn how they can control the risk factors for SIDS and SUID.

Involve providers of prenatal and postnatal care and other organizations

- Train professionals such as pediatricians, OB/GYNs, nurses, community health workers to provide both a consistent safe sleep message and appropriate role modeling for parents and caregivers.
- Build a team of safe sleep ambassadors including agencies such as the county Departments of Social Services, WIC programs, crisis pregnancy centers, pediatricians, maternal infant health programs and others to ensure consistent multi-level messaging. Safe sleep ambassadors commit to providing safe sleep education, asking parents and caregivers about infant sleep practices and ensuring that parents and caregivers have a plan to keep their babies safe during sleep. This is an essential piece of the program. Having a broad base of safe sleep ambassadors who serve as champions ensures that safe sleep messaging has a broad reach. The use of ambassadors also acknowledges that parents and caregivers are more receptive to recommendations and guidance in the context of a trusting relationship. Individual conversations with safe sleep ambassadors are often much more effective than broad advertising or marketing campaigns.
- Connect agencies with a Cribs for Kids program to empower workers who are interfacing with parents and caregivers to ask about safe sleep. Sometimes a worker may be hesitant to ask about safe sleep if they will be unable to assist the parent or caregiver if they disclose unsafe sleep plans. When the worker is confident that a local Cribs for Kids partner will be able to assist by providing a free portable crib, the worker can ask about safe sleep, knowing they can help solve the problem if the parents do not have an established plan or place for infant sleep.
- Recruit agencies who provide care at different times during the prenatal and postnatal period to be safe sleep ambassadors. This ensures that parents have multiple opportunities to hear a consistent safe sleep message. It also recognizes the fact that parents may not have specific safe sleep questions until after the baby is born and they are faced with a particular challenge or situation.

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Involve hospitals in a leadership role

- Provide technical assistance to help hospitals achieve [Cribs for Kids Safe Sleep Hospital Certification](#), which requires the hospitals to implement a safe sleep policy, provide education for staff and new parents, model no loose blankets in the crib, conduct safe sleep audits in the nursery and provide community outreach. This voluntary certification establishes a strong commitment on the part of the hospital to actively promote safe sleep. Additional information about Cribs for Kids Hospital Certification is available from [Cribs for Kids](#).
- Assist hospitals to utilize the [Halo® In-Hospital SleepSack Program](#), which provides free SleepSack wearable blankets so hospitals can replace traditional blankets and model no loose blankets in the crib. A community-based organization can also assist by covering nominal shipping costs to ensure that the program is truly at no cost to the hospital.
- Partner with nurses in maternity and pediatric units in hospitals, who are already providing education about abusive head trauma, to provide safe sleep education. Work with nurses to make sure the information is comprehensive, but also easily communicated given the limited time and complex demands placed on nurses providing care.

Evaluate the results of the safe sleep initiatives

- STHCS conducts follow-up surveys with participants of the Cribs for Kids program in which respondents report their knowledge, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors regarding infant safe sleep. The follow-up surveys also allow an opportunity for reeducation, if needed.
- Monitor and evaluate local SUID/SIDS death data to determine which aspects of the intervention are helpful and what risk factors need increased emphasis in subsequent education efforts with parents.
- Despite the challenges and limitations of evaluating prevention efforts, if an intervention is effective at increasing the proportion of the population adhering to safe sleep recommendations and decreasing in SIDS/SUID deaths, there is a greater likelihood of sustainability.

Maintain ongoing safe sleep messaging

- Social media and marketing campaigns help keep images of safe sleep environments fresh in the minds of parents and caregivers. By placing safe sleep messaging in strategic places, marketing can combat some of the misconceptions held by the public about infant sleep. Safe sleep ambassadors should be included as partners in messaging campaigns.

Conclusion

None of STHCS' safe sleep initiatives stand alone and the success of the initiatives are wholly dependent on partnerships between agencies who all share the goal of preventing infant fatalities due to unsafe sleep. These partnerships create layers of intervention and help ensure that few, if any, parents are unaware of the ABCs of safe sleep and the risks of surface sharing. As a community-based organization, we have been able to lead and coordinate safe sleep efforts in the region and create a consistent message for our partners to effectively promote safe sleep.

Southern Tier Health Care System, Inc. – Training Visuals

The ABCs of Safe Sleep:
Babies sleep safest **Alone On their Backs In a Crib**

Learn more at www.sthcs.org

CHILD HEALTH & SAFETY TEAM
A Division of Southern Tier Health Care System Inc.

Southern Tier Health Care System Inc.

Cribs for Kids
Helping every baby sleep safer

Alone

No pillows. No stuffed animals. No toys. No bumpers or positioners. No blankets.

Nothing else in the crib!
Except a pacifier.

Southern Tier Health Care System Inc.

On His/Her Back

Place baby on his/her back to sleep every time.

Let caregivers know this is how your baby sleeps.

Southern Tier Health Care System Inc.

In a Crib

Use a firm mattress with a tight fitting sheet.

Room share, **never** bed share.

Use a crib for all sleep, even naps.

All night long!

Southern Tier Health Care System Inc.

And...

Keep a smoke free environment. Breast feed safely.

Keep a comfortable temperature (68°-72°). Use a sleep sack, wearable blanket, or just light sleep clothing or PJs.

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Place Babies on their Backs to Sleep.

Tummy Sleeping (marked with a red X)

Back Sleeping (marked with a green checkmark)

Babies choke when food gets in the windpipe. Babies are safer when the windpipe is on top.

NEW YORK STATE Department of Health | Office of Children and Family Services