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NICOLE VILLALPANDO RAISING AUSTIN

## When baby won't sleep, parents call Tamiko Kelly

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By [Nicole Villalpando](#) - American-Statesman Staff

Parents who call Tamiko Kelly are often at their wits' end. They haven't slept for weeks, months, even years.

Kelly, who owns Sleep Well. Wake Happy., is a child sleep expert, specializing in newborns to 6-year-olds. She stays with the family for a few nights to a few weeks and helps them put a sleep plan together. By the end of her stay, everyone is sleeping again and everyone knows what to expect in the coming years and how to maintain the blissful state of nighttime sleep.

Sounds magical, yes? Getting children to



Austinite Tamiko Kelly of Sleep Well. Wake Happy. stays with a family to get them on a consistent sleep plan.

sleep regularly is about knowing what to do and being consistent.

Kelly got her start in 2008 when she was a nanny who would specialize in covering date nights for clients. The parents would come home and say, “Oh, my goodness, where are the kids?”

“What do you mean where are the kids?” she’d respond. “They are in bed.” Then the parents would confess that it usually would take them hours and hours to get the kids to sleep.



Austinite Tamiko Kelly of Sleep Well. Wake Happy. has been helping parents learn how to get their children to sleep since ... [Read More](#)

Moms in the San Francisco area, where Kelly was working at the time, started spreading the word about her abilities. Three years ago, after she moved to Austin and left her corporate job, she decided to turn getting children (and their parents) to sleep into a full-time business.

When Kristin Neland’s son was 12 weeks old, she called Kelly. Her son had a dairy allergy and had picked up some bad habits when she was trying to figure out why he wouldn’t nurse. He would only sleep for 45 minutes at a time. Kelly stayed with them for three nights a week for three weeks. He went from sleeping 45 minutes at a time to sleeping 12 hours straight, Neland says.

“She was able to do the things I couldn’t do,” Neland says. Even though Neland says she knew how to sleep train by reading the books, she was

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so tired; she just couldn't do it. Instead of waiting for him to go back to sleep himself, she would pick him up and nurse him, even though that wasn't what he needed.

Kelly put together a plan that included which feedings to drop. Now Neland says she wishes she had hired Kelly with her daughter, who is two years older and didn't sleep through the night until she was 7 months old. "It was worth every penny."

Kelly isn't cheap. She charges \$5,000 a week for an in-home consultation and says most clients pay for two weeks. She also offers at least a three-session virtual consultation in which parents fill out a questionnaire, then she identifies some of the problems and gives parents a plan without actually staying with them. She records their conversations so parents can play them back if they forget what she told them. That service runs \$600 to \$700.

Kelly tries to work with her clients' parenting philosophies and to help them get to where they want to be in a way that they feel good about. "If you are an attachment parent, cry it out is not going to work for you. It's against everything you believe," she says.

Parents have to be ready for change and they have to be willing to be consistent.

One of the things she sees people doing is trying several different sleeping methods without letting one of them take. "It's not one day and it works or, if it didn't work, move onto something else. That's like going to a buffet. I love to eat, but my eyes are always bigger than my stomach. It's the same thing with a baby. They get overwhelmed and so confused. You've got to pick your lane and stay in your lane and chart your result."

Kelly also does a lot of work with multiples. "One will be asleep and

another's, 'Let's go!'" While she can do multiple babies at once, they need to be in the same family. She usually helps three or four families a month.

In Kelly's experience, dads are ready to correct the situation faster than moms. When she gets a call from a dad, she says, "It's a 9-1-1 situation." Moms are more likely to be hesitant because that's their baby.

Here are some general tips Kelly offers to improve sleep habits for babies and toddlers:

**Put baby to sleep awake.** Even if you are nursing and they fall asleep, wake them up to put them to bed. If not, it can be jarring to them to not know where they are or how they got there. "All babies need to know, 'I'm safe in my crib.'"

**The crib should be as boring as possible.** They don't need a mobile or crib entertainment because that can be too much stimulation when it's time to sleep.

**Limit the light sources.** Babies really aren't afraid of the dark. Look for light sources that could be bothering them. One time, it was a TV button's on/off switch that was shining in the child's face that was the problem. If you need to have a light for nighttime diaper changes, make it a little one that isn't shining into the crib.

**Kids need downtime.** Create a bedtime routine that lasts no more than 45 minutes and is consistent. It shouldn't involve electronics. Give them a bath or maybe a small massage. Keep everything quiet and calm. Dim the lights if you can. As they get older, you can give options such as, "Do you want more books or a longer bath?" But the basic routine should be the same. And it's not read 20 books. It's one or a couple, and you determine the number, not them.

**Kids need sleep.** Most kids this age need at least 12 hours. That means you're putting them to bed between 6 and 8 p.m. Their brains are like an update on your phone. They need time to download all the information of the day and process it at night.

**Beware of the toddler negotiator.** A lot of toddlers think nighttime is "go out to the club, out to the bar, out to ACL," she says. They need more time to wind down at night and they need a consistent bedtime routine.

**Teething often is not to blame.** If kids are not bothered by teething during the day, it might not be the reason they are getting up at night. But if you think it is, go ahead and address the pain by giving something to ease it. Make sure it's not some other medical reason.

Kelly works with kids up to age 6 because, after that, if they aren't sleeping, you probably should call the pediatrician to make sure there's not a medical reason, she says. First try limiting electronics and maintaining a consistent bedtime and bedtime routine.



MICHAEL SAMARIPA

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