

Keep 'Em Both

Put your worries to rest: Babies and cats can peacefully co-exist.

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Data available to [the Centers for Disease Control] CDC do not support the idea that cats are responsible for serious injury or death to infants, said Peter M. Schantz, VMD, Ph.D., an epidemiologist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. There are two recorded cases of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), in which cats were present, Schantz said. However, no precise information about cause of death was available.

I do not believe that cats pose any risk of smothering babies, said Thomas G. Keens, M.D., SIDS researcher and pediatric pulmonologist from Childrens Hospital Los Angeles. I have actually rarely heard parents express concern that a pet cat would smother a baby, though I would tell them there is no evidence that it happens.

Although there is not hard data incriminating cats as important causes of death or unprovoked injury of infants, I would emphasize that the CDC considers it totally inappropriate to have an unsupervised animal in the young childs [under a year old] sleeping room, Schantz said.

According to experts, the best advice is to allow your cat and baby supervised contact and to keep cats out of the nursery and the crib. One recommendation is to replace the nursery door with a screen door; that way you can hear the baby, but the cat can't enter.

I do not let my cat in the nursery if I am not in there, and I keep the door closed and the monitor on, Kroll said.

Our two cats never wanted to sleep in, or even enter, the babys crib, Popolow said. However, I do have some really cute pictures of all three of them asleep on the couch together. When the baby was small, the cats did like to smell around his face a lot and would even groom his hair or face if I let them.

A cat can be a wonderful companion for a new mother, Simon said. Plus, children are fascinated by animals, and the opportunity to let your baby feel the softness of fur or the tickle of a whisker is priceless.

It is fine to allow the cat(s) to be close to the baby with supervision, Downing said. Many cats will simply adopt the new baby recognizing that it is a helpless being in need of protection.