



## **The Benefits of the Possums Method of Infant Sleep Training for Maternal Mental Health**

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### **Abstract**

This literature review explores the intersection of infant sleep training, maternal mental health, and mother-infant attachment, with a particular focus on the contrasting theories underpinning extinction-based and responsive sleep methods. Postpartum mental health vulnerabilities are closely tied to infant sleep, as mothers experience significant neural and hormonal changes during this period. Sit (2012) indicates that 10–15% of new mothers develop postpartum depression, a figure that rises to 50–60% among at-risk populations such as adolescent or inner-city mothers. These conditions are exacerbated by infant sleep fragmentation and the strain of maternal sleep deprivation. Two theoretical frameworks dominate sleep training discourse.

Extinction-based approaches, such as Weissbluth's "cry it out" and Ferber's graduated extinction, are grounded in Skinner's operant conditioning, wherein parental nonresponse functions as negative reinforcement to eliminate night waking. In contrast, the Possums method, based on Neuroprotective Developmental Care (NDC), emphasizes infant communication as inherently interactive, requiring consistent maternal responsiveness to sustain the dyadic bond. Evidence suggests that responsive methods preserve the synchrony of the mother-infant relationship and promote emotional availability, while extinction methods risk undermining infant trust and maternal instinct. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of aligning sleep training methods with maternal mental health and the biological necessity of infant attachment. Responsive frameworks such as the Possums method provide a more sustainable balance between infant development and maternal well-being.

**Keywords:** attachment theory; infant communication; mother-infant dyad; postpartum disorders; sleep hygiene