

Two Styles of Mothering

Before my son was born I attended a 'preparing for parenthood' course with my husband. It strongly advocated 'parent controlled feeding and sleeping' or scheduled feeding. This sat very comfortably with my preconceived ideas about what good mothering should be and I made the decision to feed my baby three to four hourly from birth.

I loved my routine. Samuel settled well into it and seemed to progress as the handbook said he should. I looked with disdain on those 'ill advised' women who demand fed their infants. Couldn't they see that if they responded to every demand of the baby that they would inevitably create a demanding child? It seemed common sense to me. I also didn't approve of exclusive breastfeeding. My decision to add two formula feeds into Sam's diet allowed his father to take an active role in the parenting and theoretically should have meant that Samuel would sleep through the night at eight to ten weeks old. Surely this was all in his best interests.

Samuel didn't sleep through the night as we were led to believe he should. So at eleven weeks of age we left him to cry for four hours on his own in the living room, until he got the idea that he was not the boss. It took him three nights and we were back on schedule. I helped him sleep more deeply by giving him a solid night feed at twelve weeks. Of course it took Samuel no time to decide that milk was easier to get out of a bottle than the breast and he had us fully weaned at five months.

Four and a half years later my daughter was born. I had already decided that as the routine had worked so well last time I was going to do the same again.

I don't recall how it happened, Rachel was just a very content baby, and I liked being with her so much that I seemed to feed her whenever I picked her up. It was as if I was just saying, 'hello, hungry?' I found that I thoroughly enjoyed breastfeeding her, and we seemed to bond more deeply each time we did it. Rachel refused repeated attempts to supplement her feeding with a bottle. In time I gave up. But I certainly never considered myself to be demand feeding. Imagine my surprise when a friend, a La Leche League member, pointed out that this was exactly what I was doing. I honestly had no idea. It took a while for it to sink in. I had considered demand feeders 'the enemy'. But as time went by I began to see how much I had missed of my relationship with Samuel because of my strict adherence to the routine. He is my son and I adore him but from the moment he was born we have been at odds, with me constantly forcing my will on him (I didn't even let him decide when he was hungry). And I really had lost the opportunity to have those precious innocent months with him that I was now enjoying with his sister. I did the best that I knew how for my darling Samuel, but it's as if I held him at arms length and I'm feeling the effects of that even now.

I was also upset to read research that contradicted so much of what I had been told. I learned that breast milk supply is actually built up and maintained

by suckling and not by prolonged breaks between feeds. And that it is not necessarily in a baby's best interest to sleep through the night at eleven weeks. And that babies who are exclusively breastfed are at a lower risk of SIDS.

With Rachel, I had a great deal of pressure put on us by family and friends who would ask, 'Haven't you weaned that baby yet?' But by then I didn't care. Rachel is a wonderful human being in her own right. Breastfeeding has added a warmth and closeness beyond measure to our relationship. As for the father's participation in feeding; my husband's support of my breastfeeding has been invaluable. He would sit in a close embrace with the baby and me and fully share our experience. So did Samuel. It's been great for the whole family. Add to that the enormous health benefits for both of us. I cannot understand those who say that a chemist can come up with any better nutrition than that which nature has designed.

I fed Rachel for 18 months. Now I am expecting another baby, and I have already decided to exclusively breastfeed. As for a routine, baby and I will work that out for ourselves and the clock, I suspect will have little say in the matter.

To those who have never tried breastfeeding, or who are thinking about demand feeding, I would suggest you give it a try. You really don't know what you are missing. And I thoroughly recommend contacting a La Leche League Group. The caring support of like minded people, who won't ask you, 'Haven't you weaned your baby yet?' is just wonderful.

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