



BABY TIME ANYTIME

By Wendy Malloy

Every parent knows the ecstasy and the agony of those first few months with a new baby: the pure and utter bliss of having an infant in your arms, and the pure and utter despair of feeling like you're going to collapse from sleep deprivation.

Shari Mezrah feels your pain.

Her own kids, 6 and 4, were infants not so long ago. As a new mom, Mezrah scoured the books for expert advice. And the books are great, she admits, but when it's 3 a.m., and you're nursing for the fifth time since midnight, and you have to work the next day — really, what good is Dr. Spock?

"I thought, 'Wait a second, there's got to be a way to make this work,'" Mezrah says from the south Tampa office of Baby Time, her year-old consulting business. "I developed a program that worked for my children, and they both were sleeping through the night at 6 weeks old."

She started helping friends in the same sleepless predicament, and they told friends, until soon Mezrah was spending most of her time advising fellow moms. She made it official last year and now has a range of clients all over the country.

So what's her secret?

"I'm a sleep schedule specialist," she explains. "There are ways to build a schedule so that mom and dad can have a life, mom and dad can work, and everybody can sleep peacefully. And the beautiful thing is that these kids are so happy — there isn't a big margin for crying. They know when they're going to sleep, eat and play, which alleviates

anticipatory anxiety and allows for predictability."

Julie Speck, 31, heard about Mezrah all the way in Chicago, where eight months ago the new mother felt her grip on sanity quickly slipping. Convinced her son Logan was a superhuman infant with no need for sleep, Speck made daily, hysterical phone calls to her own mother.

Mom's advice: "If you don't straighten up, your husband's going to leave you." Speck's response: "He can leave. He can take the baby with him and they can see how they do."

Today the family — including Speck's husband, who happily remains in the home — laughs about those days, but at the time, Speck saw little humor in the situation. In nine months, Logan had never slept for more than three consecutive hours. Consequently, neither had his mama.

Friends in Tampa said she needed to talk to Mezrah, and when the Specks were in town for a vacation, it finally happened. "When we met, she asked if I wanted to give her program a shot, but I was resistant — it was a pride thing," Speck recalls. "But then she said that someday I might even be interested in sex again. At that point if my husband had got near me, I would have killed him."

That did the trick. Speck took Mezrah's advice and started a new timetable for Logan that very night in their Tampa hotel room. Within three days, the baby was sleeping through the night.

"It's amazing," says the grateful mom. "He's been on the same

schedule since that fateful night in Tampa, and the greatest thing about it is that now, without fail, he goes to bed at 8 p.m., wakes up at 7 a.m., then has two naps from 9 to 10 a.m. and 1 to 3 p.m. I can plan around his schedule, knowing exactly when he's going to sleep and when he'll be up."

Today she runs a marketing technology firm from her home. And she wants another baby.

Mezrah's clients include not only frazzled new moms like Speck, but families with children up to about age 5. Boundaries are typically the key for older kids, she says, and she helps determine workable solutions based on each family's individual needs. Pregnant women also seek her out.

If we set a schedule for the family prior to giving birth, it will alleviate some post-partum issues," Mezrah says. "Granted, a lot of hormonal things are going on, but other variables are eliminated because there's a plan in place."

The plan includes setting up responsibilities in advance — who's in charge of what and when. That can help mitigate conflicts between partners during a time when everybody's zombie-like. "Everything's delineated," says Mezrah. "Mom has this responsibility, dad has this one."

And baby, she adds, is happy.

For more information on Baby Time, visit BabyTIME4you.com or call 813-760-1111. ☎

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