

Insights

Using Social Media to Raise Awareness About Infant Safe Sleep

With approximately [3,600 babies](#) dying from sleep-related deaths every year, hospitals, state health departments, and advocacy organizations across the country are seeking opportunities to help more families and health professionals learn about safe sleep guidelines. Social media's enduring popularity makes it an optimal resource for awareness building and education.



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In the past decade, the number of Americans using social media has nearly doubled, and today approximately [seven in 10 Americans](#) spend time on a social platform. Social media is prevalent across different racial/ethnic groups and all income levels and has continued to rise across all [age groups](#). And, importantly, organizations can create an account on many platforms free of charge.

With social media, organizations can share safe sleep messages—such as photos of safe environments, helpful infographics about safe sleep guidelines and links to relevant resources—that reach a large, diverse audience in their homes and at work at no cost.

It all sounds a little too good to be true, especially given that while social media is free, it does take time to master. And time is a resource that many public health professionals and organizations have in short supply. To help you maximize your social impact, we've pulled together some high-level strategies and best-practices on social media-use, from increasing your follower base to crafting share-able social posts to measuring your success.

Two tips for choosing your platform

Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter, YouTube...and the list goes on. Time-constraints make it unreasonable to try them all, so it's best to pick one or two to get started. When choosing, think about your audience and your constraints:

- **Audience:** Ask yourself, who are you trying to reach (families, clinicians, public health workers, all three)? Mapping out who you are looking to reach will help you consider which platform they're most likely to be on. It will also help you think about how to frame compelling, relevant social posts.
- **Your constraints:** Some platforms require more time than others; and some require more-specific skills. For example, Instagram and Pinterest rely on compelling graphics and photos, so if that's not your strength, consider starting somewhere else. Additionally, check with your information technology department to find out what kind of firewalls your organization uses and make sure you can access your chosen platform(s).

Create compelling content

There are many ways to grow your followers and get your posts attention but creating interesting and relevant content tops the list. How do you do this? Again, think about your audience and trust your knowledge. What questions have you heard families ask about safe sleep? What recommendations do families and even clinicians find surprising? The answers to these questions become the core of the content you'll share.

Whenever possible, try to include images or graphics with your social post. Not only are images the most popular type of social media content [for engagement](#)—they result in the most shares on Facebook and most retweets on Twitter—they are especially important for safe sleep messaging because they can clearly show what qualifies as safe. Stumped on how to create compelling graphics? PowerPoint's 'Design Ideas' function automatically creates clean graphics if you add a photo and related text. Or, try [canva.org](https://www.canva.com) for free social media templates. Other helpful resources are NICHQ's [safe sleep image gallery](#) and [SIDS Awareness month toolkit](#), and NICHD's [safe sleep media kits](#).

Develop a basic social calendar

There's a lot of debate about how often to post on different platforms, but just remember that consistency matters most and try to never go silent for more than a week. Make a plan for how many times you'll post on your chosen platform(s) each week and stick with it. Allocating time on Friday to plan all your posts for the following week can help you stay organized and streamline your process. Free tools like Hootsuite or Buffer let you schedule your posts in advance; this way, if Tuesday becomes a crazy day and you never find time to log-in, you know your post still went live.

If you're lucky enough to have multiple people in your organization partnering on social media, make sure you define roles and responsibilities. Identify who is responsible for writing the posts and developing graphics, who will review content before posting, and who will measure your progress.

Join the conversation

Social media is, above all else, *social*. If you only post about yourself and never engage with others, you'll find that fewer people and organizations engage with you (remember, no one wants to join a one-sided conversation). Get social on social and watch how it helps your follower-base grow. 'Follow' other organizations on Twitter and LinkedIn and 'Like' their pages on Facebook, and then 'Like' and re-share posts and tweets that align with your goals. Resharing others' posts can also help keep your page or account active if you don't have time to create original content often.

Pro-tip: Stumped on what to share and not sure how to start conversations with your followers? Tackle both challenges at once by polling your audience. Try showing an image of a baby sleeping that follows safe sleep guidelines and ask followers to share what about the baby's position and sleeping space makes it safe. Monitor their answers and respond to questions to keep the conversation building.

Practice the power of tagging

Many social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, allow organizations to tag other organizations in their posts by adding @ before their username or social handle. When you mention someone else, they're more likely to engage with your post and share it with their audience, which helps expand your overall reach. This also helps you *join the conversation* (see above best practice).

Hashtags are also valuable tools for gaining new followers. When you include a hashtag—such as #SIDS or #SafeSleep or #SUID—you're post is grouped with other posts that use the same hashtag and will be seen by individuals looking at the hashtag. This gives your post more exposure and results in new organizations following you or sharing the post to their followers. Public awareness months, days or weeks, such as SIDS Awareness Month or National Breastfeeding Month, usually have custom hashtags you can use in your social posts. You can also look for trending hashtags on <https://hashtagify.me/hashtag/>

Get your team involved

Social media algorithms mean that the more interactions your posts get, the more others will see them. Moreover, people are more likely to trust posts shared by those they know, such as friends and colleagues. Asking your organization's employees to follow your social accounts and share relevant posts can enhance your overall impact.

Measure your progress

Most social platforms come with a variety of analytical tools you can use to track the success of your posts. Monitoring your progress can help you figure out what's working and what's not working, and then adjust your strategy accordingly. And while measurement takes time, it keeps you from wasting more time on content that doesn't deliver the results you want. At the very least, we recommend tracking your top social post every month or week, depending on the post frequency. The 'top post' will be the one with more views, comments and likes. Think about what made that post successful (consider factors like time of day, the image you used, and the questions you asked) so you can replicate these strategies in future posts.

Above all else, remember to always make sure the photos you post are safe. Use [this worksheet](#) to check your images.