

A letter from Tweddle Mum Jen 6/7/18

I was excited, relieved and a little bit anxious when I found out my daughter Esther and I had a place in Tweddle's Residential Stay program.

Esther was 10 months old and waking up to 7 times a night. With a 3 year old as well to look after, I wasn't doing great. I was exhausted, had little patience, and felt teary, angry or stressed most of the time. Plus, the lack of sleep meant my post-natal depression and anxiety were getting worse.

I went to see my GP and she suggested a stay at Tweddle.

I was really reluctant – I'd heard of sleep schools and wasn't keen. Wouldn't it mean I'd have to leave my baby on her own to cry for hours? Would I be allowed to comfort her? How would this treatment damage her?

Despite this, I asked my GP to put in a referral because I was desperate.

When I found out we had a place I prepared myself as much as I could before coming in. I looked at Tweddle's website and Facebook page. These reassured me that Tweddle are experts on infant mental health and wouldn't advocate doing anything which could damage Esther.

I also came in to see the unit the week before and found everyone so kind – and was surprised at how beautiful the rooms were!

On the Monday morning of our stay, I felt excited and nervous.

A beaming volunteer welcomed me and showed Esther and I to our room. I met the other mums, who were lovely – we bonded instantly over our shared experiences of parenting and lack of sleep!

Soon it was time to settle Esther for her first nap. I was anxious but nurse Julie was so calm and confident, she put me at ease. She explained everything and why we did it very clearly, and while she made suggestions to help Esther with her sleeping, there was never any obligation to follow them. In fact, we were encouraged to say if something didn't sit right with us, so alternatives could be suggested.

Because all meals were provided and there was no cleaning or washing to do, Esther and I spent lots of time playing together. This was so precious, and a beautiful bonding time. It felt almost like a retreat to have this time just for us, away from the busyness of everyday life.

We had our ups and downs during our stay at Tweddle. Esther didn't always sleep when I wanted her to (just like any adult!) and there were many times when I doubted whether I was an OK parent. But the other mums and the caring and supportive nurses were there to listen, reassure and encourage.

At the end of the week, Esther overnight wakings had significantly decreased and her naps were longer. And I had learnt so much more than how to help her sleep.

Because of Tweddle, my confidence in parenting has grown so much, and I'm enjoying being a mum again! I'm so grateful to the wonderful staff for helping both of us, and I'd encourage any mums who are hesitant about attending to go for it.

For me, Tweddle was so much more than a sleep school, and while of course I'll continue to make mistakes, I'm excited to leave feeling confident that I can be a 'good enough' parent for my kids.

