

How to wean with Seb!

A guide to gently weaning your toddler.
For use with '*A big change for Seb: a breastfed toddler's weaning story*' by
Emily Hardwicke.



Children will often respond positively to other children or characters from TV or books modelling a particular behaviour. 'A big change for Seb' is partly designed so that Seb can lead the way when it comes to weaning from breastfeeding, creating a narrative that will allow you to prompt your child with aspects of the story as well as reassuring them as you start your own journey.

This guide has been created based on my own personal experience of weaning a 2.5-year-old and the extensive research I did at the time and continue to update. There are many others who are professionally qualified to give support with weaning and I am more than happy to direct you to individuals that could help with specific issues if you contact me directly.



Get in touch!
@sebtheseries



So how does the book work?

Essentially, it's a story book with a weaning from breastfeeding narrative, but you could simply enjoy it as a stand-alone story of a little boy becoming more confident and independent in the world he lives in and allow your child to see breastfeeding being represented and normalised in a picture book!

However, if you are using it to prompt or motivate your child to stop breastfeeding, you will need to use it in conjunction with other weaning strategies (some are directly referred to in the book) as well as talking to your child and discussing what happens to Seb as he goes through the weaning process.

Gentle weaning strategies included in the book:

- introducing a new 'special cup'
- distraction
- key transitions using different care givers
- communicating boundaries

How to begin...

If you've made the decision to wean, you might be now wondering how on earth to start! It can feel especially overwhelming if your child is showing no sign of slowing down and you may feel all kinds of mixed emotions about stopping in the first place.

Please know that it is ok to take control over the weaning process if you are not enjoying it anymore or have decided that this is the best thing for you, your child, and your family. However, whether you like it or not, you are in a breastfeeding relationship and moving towards the end of your breastfeeding journey together with kindness, compassion and respect for your child's emotions and feelings about it, will help you both in the long run.

A weaning process that happens too suddenly can have a negative impact on your body in terms of hormonal crashes and fluctuations that can cause feelings of sadness or anxiety, and you may physically suffer from engorgement or even mastitis if you don't give your body a chance to regulate slowly.

Your child may also sense that something that gives them comfort and security is suddenly being removed and you may find their behaviour becomes more 'clingy' or intense as they try and resist the change. A more gradual process allows them to accept alternative forms of comfort and, if they are old enough to understand, you can also communicate with them (on their level) about the changes that are happening, which might make them more accepting.

Night or day? Which should come first?

There is no one answer to this as everyone will have different family circumstances and set ups. If you are struggling with lack of sleep, night weaning may seem like the obvious answer, but this could potentially backfire as no milk overnight does not necessarily mean your child will sleep better. If they are used to feeding back to sleep quickly and calmly and this actually means everyone gets more sleep, perhaps starting with day feeds make more sense.

However, maybe you have a partner who can get your child back to sleep with other methods and you want to keep a day feed for a nap or to reconnect when you get home from work? Essentially, you need to find what works best for you and create your own plan of action!



A Plan of Action...

Ask yourself the questions below to work out what the best strategy for you and your child might be:

- *Is there a feed that your child (or you!) particularly relies on or 'needs'?*
- *Do you have a partner or another adult who can support you and your child during the weaning process?*
- *Are you away from your child for any length of time e.g. work?*
- *Is your child eating solid food and drinking other liquids reliably and consistently?*
- *How does your child prefer to go to sleep?*
- *Are they going through (or about to go through) any big changes or challenges? e.g. teething, going to childcare, moving house, new baby...*
- *What are their communication skills and level of understanding like?*
- *Do they rely on breastfeeding for comfort at particular times of day?*
- *Do you offer them feeds or do they come to you and ask for them?*
- *Are you pregnant, returning to work, feeling exhausted or experiencing breastfeeding aversion?*

You may find that asking these questions about your breastfeeding relationship will help you to pinpoint some of the areas where you might be able to start gently prompting or perhaps you may decide to wait until they are a little older and have reached a developmental milestone that might make things a little easier. You may also look at your responses and think, 'I am so done!' And that is absolutely ok too!

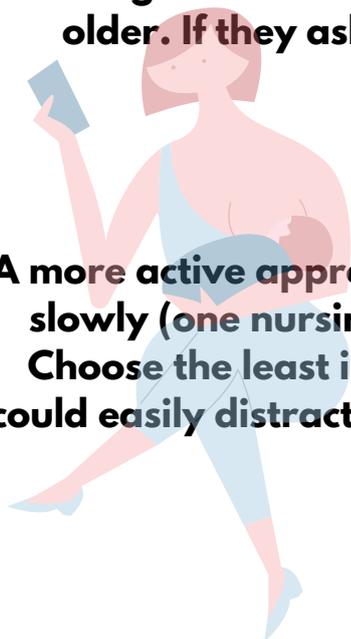
Gentle weaning tips and strategies

I would define 'gentle weaning' as strategies which may actively prompt a child into stopping breastfeeding but are always respectful of their emotions and responsive to their needs. Where possible they involve the child by communicating at their level, so they are involved in the process.

Tip 1:

Don't offer don't refuse.

This isn't a quick win, but it is one that is very respectful of your child and might even be something you naturally fall into as your child gets older. If they ask to nurse let them; if they don't, avoid offering!



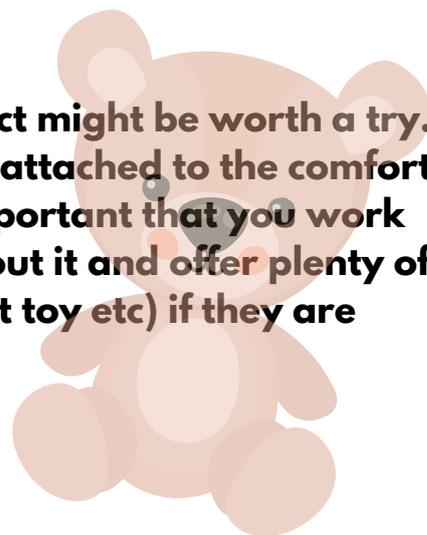
Tip 2:

A more active approach is to deliberately drop feeds. It's best to do this slowly (one nursing session per week is a good amount to aim for).

Choose the least important feed for your child or one you think you could easily distract from and start with this. Then keep plugging away at the rest!

Tip 3:

With older children an alternative comfort object might be worth a try. Every child is different, and some may be more attached to the comfort and security that breastfeeding brings. It's important that you work with your child to understand their feelings about it and offer plenty of alternative forms of comfort (cuddles, a soft toy etc) if they are struggling.



Tip 4:

Children often like to copy each other so seeing another child (in the form of a character) go through the weaning process could be helpful.

There are plenty of picture books available that you could try in addition to this one. Prompts for use with 'A big change for Seb' follow later in this guide!



How do I 'drop' a feed?

If your child is anything like mine, you might be looking at that advice going 'pah, that is easier said than done my friend!' I know it isn't as easy as that; I've been there! However, some tips that could help include the following:

- **Distract with a snack or another drink (a special cup or bottle might work as an exciting start).**
- **Make sure you aren't in the space where you would normally feed eg. a particular chair or cosy sofa. Get outside or try other forms of distraction through play or activity.**
- **Mix up routines to avoid a breastfeed being the next expected activity.**
- **Get alternative caregivers involved if possible. Time with a partner could take the pressure off you, especially for the harder to drop feeds.**
- **If your child insists on feeding, try limiting the time they feed for rather than refusing completely. 'Ok we'll have milk till I count to 10 and then we're going to get the paints out'.**
- **Having a plan for what the distraction will be before they ask to feed could be helpful and allow you to feel more in control.**

I've decided I want to night wean!

Lots of us will accept night wakings during the newborn phase where you're building a supply and then perhaps if your child starts 'reverse cycling' (taking most of their milk at night) if you go back to work and have limited time with them in the day. If you've learnt to 'breastsleep' and your toddler or child feeds without you even needing to direct the event, perhaps you're even getting enough rest to not feel the need to rush into night weaning.

On the other hand, maybe you're just done! You might want your child to be settled in their own bed, you might be pregnant, exhausted, working or you might be happy to bedshare just without a little person scrabbling at your top all night!

The tips below might help with night weaning but a lot of it is intuitive and if something doesn't feel right to you, there is no problem with stopping to recalibrate and continue later or try something different when the time is right. There are more methodical approaches I can direct you to if you would prefer a more scheduled step by step approach

1. If you can, wait till they hit 18 months. At this age, their communication skills are generally more developed, and you'll be able to explain and negotiate with them. They are also more developmentally ready to sleep for larger portions of the night.

2. If at any point you feel like things aren't working, your child is getting distressed or you change your mind, just stop, and go with your instincts! You can always go back to trying in a few weeks / months and sometimes extra time is all that is needed.

3. Get your partner proactively on board. It's much easier if you have someone you can share this with. (Don't worry if logistics mean you have to do this on your own, but do think about where you can find support for yourself if you need it).

4. If your child is happy to fall asleep without breastfeeding or you think they could be persuaded, start with this and use singing, rocking, lying next to them, cuddling, bouncing or whatever else works! If possible, getting someone else to do this step might be easier if they're used to you and your boobs but this is likely to only be a short-term solution and could make things more difficult if they are confused about why you are no longer a source of comfort at night.

5. Extend this arrangement into the night and use the alternative way of getting them to sleep without breastfeeding. Communicate with them and explain what is happening. For example: 'if you wake up in the night, Mummy isn't going to give you milk. Instead, Daddy is going to come and lie down with you (or whatever the plan is). Even if you think your child won't fully understand this, communicating the process and talking to them about it is still important as often they take in more than we think!

6. Be open to bed sharing without breasts! Often the comfort and presence of you and /or your partner will help to settle them, although you may need to rethink your pyjamas if you're used to providing open access!

7. Be aware that your child might be waking with genuine thirst so offer an alternative to breastfeeding if you think this might be the case.

8. Set a clear boundary. For example: 'when the sun comes up, we can breastfeed' or you might want to set a certain time and even show your child the number on a clock. You might want to keep this vague to begin with and play with reducing or elongating the time depending on how much success you're having!

Above all else, remember weaning is a process not an event! It doesn't have to be overwhelming or unhappy if you take it slowly and gradually and remain respectful to your child. If yours is having a hard time giving up a particular feed maybe you don't need to push it right now? Children develop so quickly and, in a few weeks, or months you may find they are much more ready to stop without a battle. Gentle weaning is not always linear, and you may have setbacks, jumps forward and steps back again. Be prepared to be patient.

Mummy explains to Seb that soon he won't need her milk anymore.

He doesn't like it when she says that, because Mummy's milk makes him feel safe and loved and it calms the tickles in his tummy.



It's normal to feel conflicted over the weaning process! Accept the emotions and take your time.

Managing your emotions during the weaning process

Breastfeeding is not just about providing your child with optimum nutrition and because it goes so much deeper than that, it's no wonder that there can be big emotions present when you start weaning. Even if the process is very much led by your child you may find that you're the one in need of some TLC!

Since you started feeding your baby solid food, you began the weaning process. You and your child are in control of what happens next, and you can take it as slowly as you like.

Taking things slowly and dropping a feed over 3-7 days will also allow your body to regulate itself and prevent emotional and physical issues as your hormones begin to change.

It is absolutely ok and much kinder on both of you to continue to provide alternative forms of comfort such as cuddling. Your child may become more 'clingy' or dependent on you for a while, but this is a season, and you will come through it. Communicate with them and explain what is happening and try to be responsive to any big feelings they are showing. It can be tough for both of you!

Continue to be present if dropping night feeds and provide alternative comfort. Your partner could get involved if this works for your family, but you know what your child will accept and what will help them settle again. It might take a while to transition to something other than breastfeeding, but it will happen.

Consider bed sharing if you don't already or perhaps set up a mattress next to your child's bed if they need comfort in the night.

If you have been feeding your child for a long time, it's easy to wrap up all your emotions of love and attachment within your breastfeeding relationship. I promise you that your relationship with your child is not dependent on breastfeeding and will continue to thrive and grow when you stop. That's not to say it's not emotional! But you can do it!

Some people find that taking picture of a final breastfeed, or commemorating their breastfeeding journey in some way, helps them to process the ending. You could have a memento made from breastmilk or choose another keepsake that reminds you of what you have achieved. Buy some decent bras, go out and get royally drunk, have a weekend away or buy some clothing that doesn't require access to your breasts! It might also help to write your breastfeeding journey down in journal form or as a letter or poem for your child.

Ultimately, weaning can be an overwhelming prospect where feelings of anxiety (how will I parent without my boobs?), guilt (but my child still really needs this), and relief (I just want this to be over!) can co-exist simultaneously. Add in a cocktail of hormones and you have the recipe for a perfect storm!

Remember, although it isn't often talked about, there are plenty of others experiencing the same thing and you are NOT alone. You are also allowed to stop breastfeeding even if your child is still keen.

Ignoring your own needs and carrying on just to be able to comfort your child is not respectful of the fact that this is a relationship between the two of you. Just as forcing them to feed (not sure how you would even do that!) would not be healthy, carrying on when you really don't want to anymore is not respectful of your own needs. Setting a healthy boundary with your child will allow you to protect that relationship, as well as your emotional wellbeing, physical space, needs, wants, time and energy.

Taking the process slowly and gradually allows your emotions and physical symptoms to regulate over time and although you may still grieve at the end of your journey, this is entirely natural and normal.

Managing your child's emotions during the weaning process

Although this may seem like a daunting prospect, some of you may be surprised by how quickly and amicably your child may accept the end of your breastfeeding journey. Of course, there will also be those who bitterly resent it and if you are coming up against some big emotions you will need to decide how you are going to manage this.

Option 1: There is no clock ticking so if your child is adamantly pushing back against any of your attempts at weaning there is always the option to do nothing. Children change and develop so quickly you may find that a couple of weeks or a month makes all the difference, and they are far more accepting with a little more time.

Option 2: Accept the emotions but set the boundary. If you are thoroughly done with breastfeeding you may need to accept your child's feelings, sit with them, help them through this period and be respectful of their needs. It is ok to say 'No, this is my body and we are not doing this anymore' and give an alternative.

One way you can do this is by using the *ACT Therapeutic Limit Setting model*, developed by Dr. Garry Landreth, a leading figure in play therapy.

ACT Limit Setting

1. **Acknowledge the feeling:** 'I know you really want to nurse right now. You are tired and it helps you to sleep.'
2. **Communicate the limit:** 'I can't let you nurse anymore. It's my body and we have stopped now.'
3. **Target the Alternative:** 'We are going to cuddle instead, and I will lie with you while you go to sleep.'

This will obviously look different depending on the situation you are in and what your child is expressing. Indeed, part of making this effective is by really listening to your child and reflecting what they are feeling. Respectfully letting them know the boundary and redirecting them to what they can do is then really important.

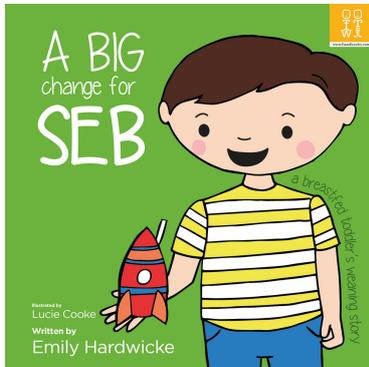
If they don't comply, staying calm, repeating the boundary, and redirecting them to what they can do instead will help if you are able to be consistent about this.

Drawing on support from a partner or other family member might be useful here if you are struggling.

How to use 'A big change for Seb'.

You know your child best and you will need to be flexible whilst using the book and these question prompts depending on the age or developmental stage of your child.

Some questions may not work if your child is not communicating at this level yet but could still be used to help you talk to them about the ideas in the book.



Cover - Read out the title, point to Seb and ask your child: "Who is this?" Follow up with: "What do you think he is holding? Shall we find out? Is Seb happy or sad?"

Page 1 and 2



- Can you find Seb in the picture?
- How many slides does Seb's favourite park have?
- Why can't Seb go down the tunnel slide?

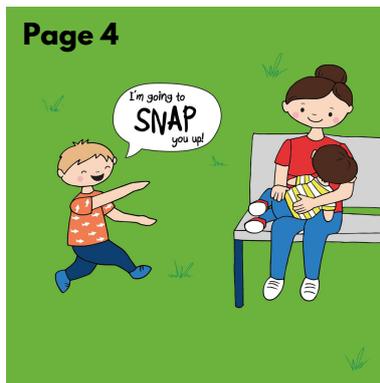
Page 3

Can you find Charlie?

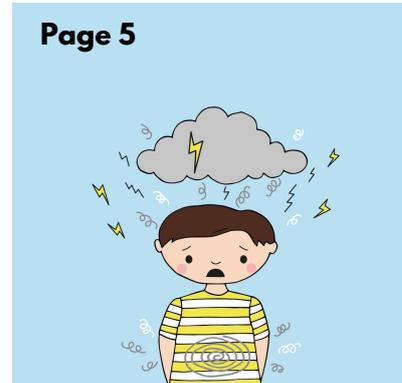


What does Jake like to do? What is Seb doing in the picture? *Here you could also talk to your child about the reasons why they might breastfeed or remind them of more personal experiences for you both.

Page 4



Page 5



Why is Seb sad? *Again, this is an opportunity to discuss your own personal weaning journey with your child and make a connection with how they might feel.

Remember, the best place to buy the book is from my website www.sebtheseries.com. You can also purchase from Amazon!

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Do you remember what Seb had in his hand on the cover? Can you see it in this picture? Do you think Seb likes his new rocket bottle? Where can Seb still have Mummy's milk? (With this question you can give your child options: house, park, shops)

Page 7



What do you think? Seb will never be too big for rocket bottles, cuddles or Mummy's milk?

Page 8



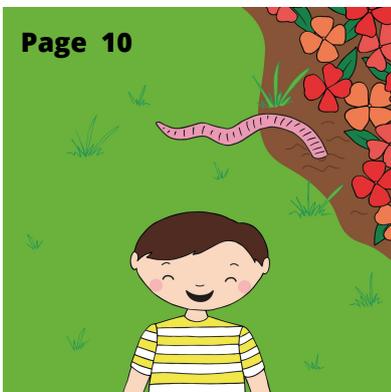
What can you see in the bag?

Page 9



What does Seb have in his hand?

Page 10



What do you think? Seb forgets about the worm, that he wanted milk or to show Amira the worm?

Page 12



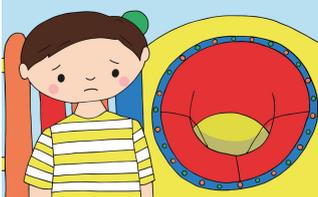
What does Seb do when he gets home? Does he have any milk? What does Seb have for tea? Does he have any milk?

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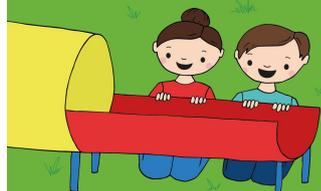
Where is Seb? What is he playing with? What is Daddy playing with?

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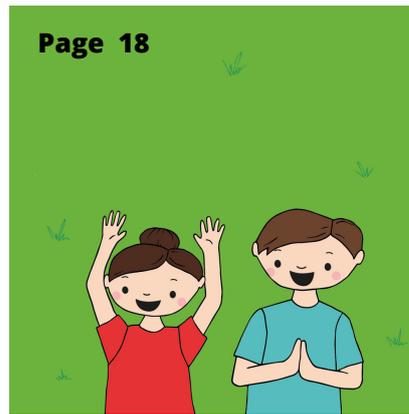
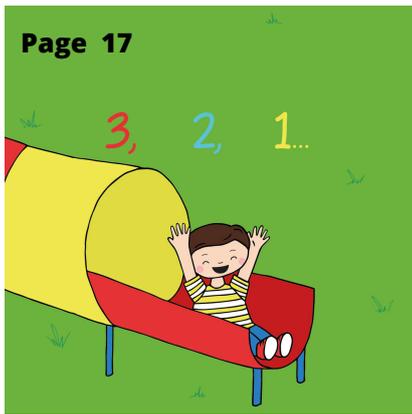


Where does Seb go at the weekend? Why is it a special day for Seb?

Page 16



Does Seb feel happy, sad or scared?



**Does Seb feel sad, scared or brave?
Why are Mummy and Daddy so happy?**



Where is Seb? What is he dreaming about? Can you point to his rocket bottle?

After reading the book and discussing the story with your child, you might want to work on a more specific weaning plan just as you might approach any other kind of project with key actions and suggested deadlines!

If you found the questions earlier in the guide helpful to start thinking about what might work for your circumstances, you might come up with something that could look like this.

Weaning plan:

Goal: I would like to aim for X to be fully weaned in around 2 months although I am willing to be flexible and take longer if they are finding particular feeds difficult to drop.

Strategies to use:

Week 1 – Use Seb as a starting point and tell X we are going to do the same plan. No milk when we are out of the house. At home, I will also use don't offer, don't refuse to try and reduce feeds. Introduce a new special bottle for milk as an alternative but not too bothered if this is only used outside the house.

Week 2 – Continue with these methods but make more deliberate attempts to get out of the house and distract around key times of day. Continue to read 'A big change for Seb' and remind X how we are doing the same thing as Seb.

Week 3 – Start to work on night feeds by introducing a boundary. One last bedtime feed. Other wake ups before morning we will cuddle back to sleep. Communicate this to X.

Week 4 – Continue with these methods.

Week 5 – Continue with these methods.

Week 6 – Start to work on the final feed. Set up a slightly different bedtime ritual with milk in a cup and a banana, stories, lying down to sleep with me and cuddles and singing.

Some of you may prefer to work more organically without a step-by-step approach, which is absolutely fine! The weaning process is so dependent on the set up of your own individual circumstances and everyone is going to be different. This is why it's important to think about what strategies you are happy to use (if any) and what your child will respond to best.

I hope this guide has been helpful and given you some key areas to think about as you embark on the end of your breastfeeding journey. I also hope that Seb's experience may help you and your little one as you navigate this time!

If you've found 'A big change for Seb' or this guide useful, please consider supporting me by adding a book review to Amazon (just search for the title), my Facebook page [@sebtheseries](#) or use Instagram [@sebtheseries](#) to spread the word! I'd love to be able to publish another Seb book and with your help, I hope to make that happen one day!

