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Tizzie Hall puts the babies of Australia to sleep. The Dubliner who has made a thriving business from parenting advice told **Luke O'Neill** how she started, and shares some of the common sleep problems that trouble babies and parents.

“Some parents come to me with so little sleep that they can be hallucinating. It's unbelievable what sleep deprivation can do to parents.”

ANYONE with a newborn will tell you the value of a good night's sleep and parents delirious for the lack of it seek help wherever they can.

So it's little wonder that Tizzie Hall, an Irish 'baby whisperer' living in Melbourne, has come to be relied upon by sleep-famished parents.

For the last 15 years, she has been giving bewildered parents advice on how to get their children down for a proper night's sleep, leading her to become known as the "baby whisperer".

Hall's love for babies began with an unfortunate family loss. When she was seven, her brother died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. The event, obviously, caused much pain for Hall's mother. For Hall, the bereavement meant she became "obsessed with babies".

"I would knock on my neighbours' doors and ask if I could take their babies for a walk," says Hall.

Hall says that from an early age she could tell the difference between the cry of an 18-month-old and a three-year-old because of their different rhythms.

As a child, her ability to glean from these cries just what a baby needed soon led to her being sought after by weary mothers and fathers.

"[My neighbour] Brenda phoned my parents' house and said 'I need to talk to Tizzie because the baby is crying and I need to know whether it's a going-to-sleep cry'.

"That's when I got labelled the baby interpreter and the baby whisperer," she says.

Hall flirted with the idea of becoming a vet, moving to England when she was 18 to undertake Veterinary Studies at Nottingham University. The realisation she would have to touch animals' teeth soon put an end to that ambition. Babies were always in the picture.

"When I went to university I was babysitting or nannying.

"When I finished, I started helping people with their babies in London. I went from house to house solving sleep problems. And I became the person people would call when their baby wouldn't sleep."

Word of mouth was a powerful tool. She came to backpack in Australia in 2003 but the people she had helped in England continued to keep in touch, emailing to tell her of new problems and to ask her for more tips.

"I would sit in pubs in Australia typing emails back to people explaining to them what to do.

"This bloke came up to me and said 'What are you doing? I see you here every night, typing emails. That looks really interesting'."

The chance encounter led to Hall creating her website, Save Our Sleep,

where she began to charge people a small fee for parenting advice.

It grew from there and soon her regular advice was being packaged into a monthly column for Practical Parenting magazine.

The column caught the attention of Pan Macmillan, who approached Hall to collate the pieces into her first book, published in 2005.

It sold more than 20,000 copies in a month and had to be reprinted.

Hall says parents come to her with a wide range of problems, often suffering from a severe lack of sleep.

"Some parents come to me and they

have had so little sleep that some can be hallucinating. It's unbelievable what sleep deprivation can do to parents."

Generally, she works with children up to two years of age but says she once had a client who was 16.

"One of the really common ones in Australia is that babies are too cold. So when we put bedding on, they go to sleep."

Hall, who has two kids of her own, three-year old Darragh and 16-month old Cillian, says that parents who come to the door of her business in Barwon Heads are made to feel a part of the family.

"I think there is just this sense of confidence here and the babies pick up on it."

Hall and her team's method is to ask parents 10 questions about the babies' habits and environment.

Dealing with crying babies sounds like many people's idea of hell, but Hall says that it rarely comes to that point as the solution is often simple.

"We don't normally get to the point where there is crying because we can work out an environmental factor forcing the baby to stay awake," she says.

She is a huge admirer of the Irish

Mothers' Group in Sydney, that has regular meet-ups to share tips and advice about parenting Irish children in Australia.

"That's a really great community. I was going to come up [to Sydney] for their catch-up a few weeks ago.

"I want to get involved with starting one down here," says Hall.

She is hoping to set up a Melbourne page of the popular network. Given her background and unique talents, it seems she's a good fit for the job.

For more info see:
www.saveoursleep.com.au



BABY WHISPERER: Tizzie Hall with husband Nathan and sons Daragh and Cillian (now three and 16 months old). The Dubliner's deep empathy for babies and her ability to read their emotions has led her to start a business in Melbourne helping sleep-deprived parents and their nippers get some shut-eye.