

A CHILDREN'S sleep clinic, founded by a Sanderstead mother-of-four, has started to train NHS health visitors and other childcare professionals.

Naturally Nurturing is the brain-child of Chireal Shallow, 33, from Sanderstead Hill, who deplores the fact that so many parents are made to feel guilty and inadequate if their children are troublesome at bed time.

She said: "I had no sleeping problems with my first two daughters, Pariss, now 13, and Suraha, 8, but three years ago, when I was expecting my twins, Charlotte and Sophie, I couldn't find any information anywhere about getting multiples to sleep.

"So I used my professional training as a behavioural psychologist to evolve a method that worked for me.

"Later my friends encouraged me to set up my own consultancy and since I had always wanted to work in private practice I took very little persuading to establish a web-site."

The anonymity of the Internet has allowed parents to express their concerns more openly and the sheer volume of enquiries has made Chireal realise that the problems of coaxing young children to sleep are much more widespread than previously thought.

The standard response from health professionals is to recommend that a child is left to cry itself to sleep, but Chireal says this is upsetting to caring parents.

She has been offering a more holistic approach, exploring family relationships during the day as well as at children's bedtime, and trying to dispel the higher levels of anxiety that so often manifests themselves as a child's reluctance to go to sleep.

She said: "Our kinder alternative has proved successful in Canada, France and Germany. Now we are beginning to have an influence on the attitudes of health professionals in Britain.

"Our fully accredited course is designed as part of continuing professional development - it is specifically intended for applicants who wish to train as sleep consultants.

"So all our students must already hold basic qualifications and have practical experience that is directly related to child care and child health."

The course is designed in seven modules, four of which are delivered face-to-face over two days, with the remaining three being done by distance learning over the next six months.

The course costs £550 - at the moment Chireal is delivering the face-to-face modules, once a quarter in Croydon Town Hall, but she says she will be happy to increase the frequency if necessary.

For more information about the clinic and its course visit www.babysleepclinic.co.uk or call 0845 465 0494.

By David Callum, Croydon Advertiser