

ZZZs, Please! Bedtime for Preschoolers



Getting enough sleep is important for your child's mental and physical development. A sleepy child is more irritable, more accident prone, and less able to pay attention than a well-rested child. Children vary, but most preschoolers need to sleep about 10 to 12 hours a day. Although there isn't one sure way to raise a good sleeper, the key is to try from early on to establish healthy bedtime habits. Here are some strategies to try.

How can I help my child develop good sleeping habits?

- Set fixed times for going to bed, waking up, and taking naps.
- Set aside some quiet time during the day for a nap. Explain that you want your child to start out in bed, but that it's OK to play in the bedroom quietly if he can't sleep.
- Stick to a regular bedtime, alerting your child both 30 minutes and 10 minutes beforehand.
- Include a winding-down period a half hour or so before bedtime. Offer a small, healthy snack. (Remember tooth brushing afterward!) Avoid stimulating games or television. Develop a relaxing bedtime routine that ends in the room where he sleeps.
- Let your child choose which pajamas to wear, which soft toy to take to bed, etc.
- Put him to sleep in the same quiet, cozy, sleep environment every night.
- Use the bed for sleeping only. Keep televisions and computers out of the bedroom.
- Play soft, soothing music if it helps your child relax.
- Tuck your child into bed for a feeling of affection and security.
- Kiss him goodnight and leave the room.

What if my child has difficulty falling asleep or gets up during the night?

- Keep things quiet at bedtime to ease the transition. If your child can hear talking, laughing, or sounds from a computer or TV, it's easy to see how she might feel left out.
- Let her have a night-light or leave a door slightly open if she dislikes the dark.
- Encourage your child to fall asleep alone. Lying down with a child until she falls asleep can be a hard habit to change. If your child gets up, reassure her that she is safe and return her to her bed.

What can I do if my child isn't tired at bedtime?

- Increase active, outdoor play (though not within three hours of bedtime).
- Scale back daytime naps.
- Wake her earlier in the morning.

Bedtime battles can test a parent's resolve. If your child is pushing the limits, state your expectations clearly but calmly and stick to the routine. Eventually, your consistency should pay off in a good night's sleep for everyone. If it doesn't and you're worried about your child's sleeping patterns, talk with your doctor.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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