

Questions & Answers about bedtime and naptime

Many pre-school children fight bedtime/naptime because they are afraid they will miss out on something. Although parents should realize that nothing works all the time for every child, a regular routine and support from parents will help most young children go to sleep and get the rest they need without a lot of bedtime or naptime hassles.

1. I have a 4-year-old son and a 2-year-old daughter. How much sleep should they get?

Children vary in the amount of sleep they need, just like adults. There is no set number of hours recommended. Watching how children behave is a good way to tell if they get enough sleep. If they seem tired and fussy during the day, then they probably need more sleep.

On the average, an infant sleeps about 16 hours a day. By one year of age, a child sleeps about 14 hours a day. By the age of four, children sleep 12 hours on average, and by age eight, this total drops to about 9 hours of sleep.

2. My preschool boys, ages 3 and 5, seem to get more wound up as the night goes on. How can I make a routine that will help them unwind before bedtime?

Set a regular bedtime but don't be too strict. Make children's bedrooms inviting places to be. Include their favorite things so they feel comfortable and secure. Try to make the last hour or so before bedtime quiet and relaxing.

Help kids take baths, brush teeth, and put on pajamas, and do small rituals such as kissing all of their stuffed animals goodnight. Reading books or quietly talking about the day are good activities to help children unwind and feel ready to go to

sleep. Be aware that children may learn to turn simple rituals into long and involved ones—with endless glasses of water, snacks, trips to the bathroom, extra stories, and countless questions—all requested in order to stall for time. Be firm and clear while keeping routines simple.

3. Whenever my 2-year-old son gets a new toy, he wants to sleep with it. Is this okay?

You can make part of the bedtime ritual, allowing your child to choose two or three toys to take with him to sleep. By doing this, you limit the number of toys he takes with him, but you also avoid problems by giving him choices. Make sure any toy he sleeps with is safe and okay for his age level.

4. If my 18-month-old daughter wakes up in the middle of the night, what should I do?

First, wait and see if she will go back to sleep on her own. If she doesn't, give her what she needs in a calming and reassuring way (a drink, a diaper change, etc.). Give her a comforting

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hug, and put her back to bed.

5. Our 3-year-old son sometimes has trouble sleeping and gets frightened at being alone. Should we allow him to sleep with us for a while?

There are different ideas about children sleeping with their parents. Some experts believe that children feel more loved and secure if they sleep in their parents' bed, especially if they are feeling sick or having trouble sleeping. Others feel that children should learn to sleep by themselves. Consider both sides of the issue and decide what works best for your family.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission warns that placing babies under the age of 2 in adult beds may cause them to suffocate or choke. Babies should be placed to sleep on their backs in a crib that meets current safety standards and has a firm, tight-fitting mattress. All soft bedding and pillow-like items should be removed from the crib.

6. What can I do instead of letting my child sleep with me?

Some parents do not allow children to sleep with them during the night, but welcome them in the morning to snuggle for a while. Other parents lie down on their children's beds as they are going to sleep and then leave, or they allow their children to fall asleep in the parents' bed but then take them to their own beds, with children being

aware of this plan ahead of time. Another idea is for children to make a pallet and sleep beside their parents' bed. Some families have special weekend "campouts" in the living room where everyone sleeps together on the floor in sleeping bags. There are no right or wrong answers about sleeping with children; do what works best for your family and feels comfortable for you.

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7. My 5-year-old son still likes to sleep with a night light on and his bedroom door open. Is that okay?

A night light helps many children feel relaxed and secure as they fall asleep, especially if they are afraid of the dark. Some children also prefer their bedroom doors to be left open. Both of these things may help children who need to use the bathroom in the middle of the night.

8. My 2½-year old daughter is beginning to outgrow naps, but she gets cranky if she doesn't take one. What should I do?

Even if she doesn't go to sleep,

tell your child she has to stay in bed for one hour doing something quiet, such as looking at books or listening to soft music. Reading stories with your child in a quiet, cozy way may promote nap taking. You can also teach your child to use a simple cassette recorder so that she can play naptime music. Another idea is to make naptime different from bedtime—have a special stuffed toy for naps, allow your child to take a nap in a room other than her own, or to use a special blanket only for naps.

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