

The No-Cry Sleep Solution for Toddlers and Preschoolers

Gentle Ways to Stop Bedtime Battles and Improve Your Child's Sleep

Eight Sleep Tips For Every Child

The following sleep ideas are of value to almost any sleeper, regardless of age. These tips can bring improvement not only in your child's sleep, but also in her daytime mood and, last, but certainly not least – improvements in your own sleep and outlook as well.



1. Maintain a consistent bedtime and awaking time seven days a week.

Your child's biological clock has a strong influence on her wakefulness and sleepiness. When you establish a set time for bedtime and wake up time you “wind” your child's clock so that it functions smoothly.

Aim for an early bedtime. Toddlers and preschoolers respond best with a bedtime between 6:30 and 7:30 P.M., and most children will actually sleep better and longer when they go to bed early.

2. Encourage regular daily naps.

Daily naps are important since an energetic child can find it difficult to go through a long day without a rest break. A nap-less child will often wake up cheerful and become progressively moodier, fussier or hyper-alert as the day goes on, and as he runs out of steam. Moreover, the length and quality of naps affects nighttime sleep – good naps equal better night sleep.

3. Set your child's biological clock.

Take advantage of your child's natural biology so that he's actually tired when bedtime arrives. Darkness causes an increase in the release of melatonin, the body's sleep hormone, and it is the biological “stop” button. You can help align your child's sleepiness with his bedtime by dimming the lights in your home during the hour before bedtime. Exposing your child to morning light is like pushing a “go” button in her brain — one that says, “Time to wake up and be active.” So keep your mornings bright!

4. Develop a consistent bedtime routine.

Routines create feelings of security. A consistent, peaceful bedtime routine allows your active child to transition from the motion of the day to the tranquil state required to fall asleep. A specific before-bed routine naturally and easily ends with sleep.

An organized routine helps you coordinate the specifics that must occur before bed: bath, pajamas, tooth-brushing. It helps you to function on auto-pilot at the time of day when you are most tired and least creative.

5. Create a cozy sleep environment.

You may have never given much thought to where your child sleeps, but it can be one of the keys to better sleep. Make certain the mattress is comfortable, the blankets are warm enough, the room temperature is right, pajamas are comfy and the bedroom is welcoming.

6. Provide the right nutrition to improve sleep.

Foods can affect energy level and sleepiness. Carbohydrate-rich foods can have a calming effect on the body, while foods high in protein or sugar generate alertness, particularly when eaten alone. A few

ideas for pre-bedtime snacks are: whole wheat toast and cheese, bagel and peanut butter, oatmeal with bananas, or yogurt and low-sugar granola.

Vitamin deficiencies that are due to consistently unhealthy food choices can affect a child's overall health, including her sleep. Make your best effort to provide your child with a daily assortment of healthy foods.

7. Help your child to be healthy and fit.

Many children don't get enough daily physical activity. Too much TV watching, coupled with a lack of activity amounts to a sedentary lifestyle – which prevents good sleep. Children who get ample daily physical exercise fall asleep more quickly, sleep better, stay asleep longer and wake up feeling more refreshed.

Avoid physical activity in the hour before bedtime, though, since exercise is stimulating and has an alerting effect – so they'll be jumping on the bed instead of sleeping in it!

8. Teach your child how to relax and fall asleep.

Many children get in bed but aren't sure what to do when they get there! It can be helpful to follow a soothing pre-bed routine that helps create feelings of sleepiness. A common component of the bedtime ritual is story time, and for good reason. A child who is listening to a parent read, or tell a tale, will tend to lie still and focus on the story. This quiet stillness will allow him to become sleepy.

Commit to working with these eight ideas and you'll likely see improvements in your child's sleep, and yours too.



Excerpted with permission by McGraw-Hill Publishing from **The No-Cry Sleep Solution for Toddlers and Preschoolers** (McGraw-Hill 2005).