

How to Help Your Child Have a Successful Bedtime

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Infants and young children need 10 to 12 hours of sleep daily to support healthy development. Parents also need to feel rested to be nurturing and responsive to their growing and active young children.



When your child does not get enough sleep, challenging behaviors are more likely to occur. Your child might get more easily frustrated, get upset more quickly, and be unable to engage well in interactions with others. Lack of sleep can also have a negative impact on your child's ability to learn. When a young child sleeps, their body is busy developing new brain cells that they need for her physical, mental and emotional development. Babies and young children thrive on predictability and learn from repetition. It is important to establish a bedtime routine that you and your child both understand and helps everyone to feel calm and relaxed.

Suggestions for Families

Notice your child's signs of sleepiness. They might pull on their ears, rub their eyes or put their head on your shoulder. You can say, "I see you rubbing your eyes. You look sleepy. Let's get ready for bed." Teaching your child to label and understand their body cues will help them use language instead of challenging behavior (e.g., whining, crying, temper tantrums) to communicate their needs.

A picture schedule can help your child understand the steps and expectations of the routine. You can use photos or objects. To learn more about how to create a visual schedule, visit <https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/> and type "visual schedule" in the search box in the upper right corner.

Provide your child with activities, sounds or objects that help them feel calm and restful during the hour before bedtime. Make these activities part of your nightly routine. For example, reading books, listening to soft, calming music, and/or giving your child their pacifier, favorite blanket or stuffed animal will all help to understand that it is time to calm down and prepare for sleep.

Tell your child what will happen when they wake up. Your child may be resistant to going to sleep because they do not want to miss out on an activity or have their day to come to an end. Reassure your child that tomorrow will be filled with more fun and special time. You can also include tomorrow's activity on the picture schedule (e.g. provide a picture of her teacher or preschool).

Give your child your undivided and unrushed attention as you prepare her for bed. Bedtime can be a positive experience filled with quality time for you and your child.

Suggestions for Educators

For children who spend the day at a centre, nap time is an important time to rest and prepare for afternoon learning and activities. Educators use a consistent routine so children know what to expect and can participate. Children can select and set up a napping area, get pillows or blankets from cubbies and choose a book to read. Routines might include brushing teeth, using the toilet, stories read aloud by educators, or soft music. Children understand the steps they need to follow to get ready for the nap, how long they are expected to rest and what they can do when they wake up. When everyone understands the expectations and routine, naptime can be a relaxing and happy part of the day.

The Bottom Line

Bedtime is a daily opportunity for you to build and nurture a positive relationship with your child. Predictable routines make children feel safe and secure. When you provide a predictable bedtime routine, you are teaching your child the skills they need to relax and transition from the busy activity of the day to preparation for sleep. When your child is able to get a restful sleep, you will also feel more calm and rested. A successful bedtime routine that you follow regularly will prepare you both for shared days of family fun and learning.

More resources can be found at:
<https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/>
www.sleephaven.ca

