

Sleepy-time

– helping your toddler (and you!) get a good night's sleep

Battles at bed time are all too common if there's a toddler in your house! Children often do not want to go to sleep. Going to sleep means missing out on things. Many children are still afraid of the separation at night, especially those under three.

Try these rituals to make bedtime easier:

- a relaxed bath
- a drink
- read them a story
- have a cuddle, kiss and tell them 'goodnight'.

Remember - the half hour before bed is not a good time for tickles, wrestles, quarrels, TV or other excitement. It helps to have a 'wind down' time and dim the lights to help prepare for sleep.

Let children know in advance that bedtime is coming, eg. 'just one more game and then it's time to get ready for bed' - and mean what you say. This can prevent the pestering for more time to stay up.

Explain to children that everything they want has to be done before bed. Calls for drinks, trips to the toilet, etc.

Some children can relax more easily with a night light, soft music or a story tape playing.

- ❖ Many toddlers like to take a special toy to bed or have their dummy.
- ❖ Some also need the door open so they know that you are near. If your child is anxious, let her know that you will pop in during the night to check how she is.
- ❖ At times when children are sick, lonely, sad or frightened they may need help to go back to sleep.
- ❖ Changes in your child's life, such as moving house, separations, family tensions or starting preschool, can be a factor.

Night waking

Night waking is common. Some children can resetttle themselves. At

other times they need help to go back to sleep.

- Try to settle him in his bed when he first goes to sleep (not in your bed or in front of the TV).
- During the night when he wakes, go to him and quietly reassure him that everything is all right. Say something like 'sleep time now', then walk out of the room as long as he is not crying.
- If your child comes into your room when he wakes, lead him back to his bed and resetttle him there.
- Have a small mattress near your bed – settle your toddler in their own bed first and tell them they can come into your room if they wake up or put a spare bed in your child's room, so that you can be comfortable and can rest while he needs you close.



Going to bed problems

Sometimes parents find it hard to get young children to go to bed, or their waking early causes problems. Some of the reasons a child may not want to go to bed can be:

- having to go off on his own and leaving people or interesting things that are happening in the house behind
- being frightened of being left alone (no matter what time you put your child to bed if he is afraid or worried he will still be unhappy)
- not being tired yet or going to bed too early
- a very busy or exciting day, or too much excitement just before bed (quiet wind-down time helps)
- being affected by daylight saving (just like some adults)
- lack of a night-time routine to help him wind down.

Settling older toddlers

Try leaving a soft light on, giving a cuddly toy, giving him something of yours to cuddle, eg. an old T-shirt that has 'your smell' on it. Many still like their dummy at bedtime.

Some children need you to stay near while they go to sleep. If you decide to do this, don't sneak out without telling your child. This may keep him tense and on edge in case you do it again. You can whisper that you are going to another room and will be back soon. Make sure you do return soon. If your child copes with this you can start taking a bit longer before coming back, but make sure you always return before he gets upset as this builds trust. Even if he has fallen asleep give him a goodnight kiss and whisper 'I came back'.

Children usually grow out of night waking by the time they are three or four (when they feel more secure being by themselves).

Sleepwalking

Sleepwalking mostly happens when children are between three and seven years old. As they grow older they sleepwalk less, (but a few adults still do it). Children have no control over what they do when they are sleepwalking and may hurt themselves.

Sleepwalking can involve sitting upright in bed, crawling and moving around the cot or bed. Sleepwalking tends to run in the families. It doesn't mean that your child has emotional or psychological problems (unless there is some other stress in your child's life). Some children sleepwalk more if they are unwell and have a fever, or get overtired. Some medicines also seem to have an effect. Sometimes children sleepwalk if they have a full bladder.

There is no special treatment to stop sleepwalking, the important thing is to make sure your child is safe. Lock doors and windows, put barriers across stairs, and place heaters, electric cords and any other dangerous objects out of the way.

Look after yourself

Broken sleep makes everyone exhausted and irritable. Make sure you ask for help from family and friends and try and get some rest during the day. Some people may suggest that you let your baby/toddler 'cry it out' or that you use controlled crying/comforting. Your baby/toddler needs you to respond when he cries, to help him feel safe.

Karitane and Tresillian offer support to families who continue to struggle with getting babies or toddlers to sleep.

There are a wide range of 'normal' sleep patterns between 3 and 5 years. Many children of this age need about 10 to 12 hours of sleep a night. Young children may need a daytime nap as well, but by kindergarten age only a few children still need a sleep during the day. Bedtime can vary a lot. Some may go to bed by 6.30pm, while many go to bed later, up to 9.30pm. Wake up time may be early or late. Often children who wake up late also go to bed late. Children under 3-4 years may still feel insecure when they are separated from their parents, especially at night.

