



So you want to know more about...

Sleep

Good Night, Sleep Tight!

Although some babies sleep through the night from a very young age, they are the exception. New parents have bags under their eyes to prove it! Most babies develop more reasonable sleep patterns during their first year but some do not. Older children can sometimes develop sleep struggles later on. Unfortunately, a sleep-deprived parent is the one person on the planet who's least likely to have an effective response to the midnight beckon. It's easy to feel frustrated, and it's tempting to take the path of least resistance: let them crawl into bed with you, give an extra feeding, or do other late-night hoop-jumping.

The good news is that sleep disturbances with children of all ages can usually be resolved with a concerted effort. Consistency is essential. Kids, especially tired ones, are comforted by rituals. It

generally takes about two weeks of trying a new sleep plan to see results. Once you have chosen a course of action, you need to give your child time to adjust. Save new ideas for a second action plan if necessary.

It's important to make sure that nighttime doesn't become cuddly togetherness time. All children stir from time to time in the night, and **will** wake up if they have learned there is something good available during those wee hours. What child wouldn't wake up for a cozy interlude? The problem is that these interruptions negatively affect both kids and parents.

Environmental factors play a big role in the quality of sleep:

- **Light:** Some children like their rooms dark, some need a small nightlight.

- **Noise:** Make sure household noise isn't too distracting. It can be comforting to have soft music playing as white noise. It's an auditory cue to relax.
- **Temperature:** Many children kick their blankets off, and blankets can be a suffocation hazard for infants. A Sleep Sack is safer for infants.
- **Texture:** Many children have preferences for the fabric of their blankets. Pay attention to the ones they nuzzle most. Comfort objects like teddy bears can also be helpful; Safe Sleep recommendations suggest leaving no plush items in infant cribs to reduce the risk of SIDS.
- If your child wakes in the night, don't go through the entire bedtime routine again. Check that she's OK and say goodnight.

The Family Bed

Though it may seem cozy when your child is a toddler, having a 4 year-old hop into your bed and flail all night long can be downright annoying. Other families choose to share their bed with great success. We suggest considering the following criteria to help you decide how you should sleep.

- Are you concerned about reducing the risk of SIDS?
- Are both parents and child getting enough quality sleep?
- Does your child respect your privacy?
- Does having a child in your bed negatively affect your marriage?
- Is having the child in your bed more comfort for the adult or child?
- Are you encouraging your child's independence in other ways?

Further reading

- *Goodnight Moon*, by Margaret Wise Brown
- *I Hate To Go To Bed!* by Katie Davis
- *Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems*, by Richard Ferber

Ages & Stages

1-3 months: Sleep patterns may be unpredictable. Exposure to daylight helps babies differentiate days and nights. Infants may sleep up to 18 hours a day.

4-6 months: Many infants sleep through the night, 6-7 hours at a stretch. Sleep-wake cycles often include 2-3 daytime naps. Babies sleep ~14-16 hours a day.

6-12 months: Morning naps become shorter or disappear, and midday naps grow longer. Nighttime stretches may be longer, between 8-10 hours. Nursing babies should be able to go the whole night without a feeding. Children need between 14-16 hours sleep.

1-2 years: Toddlers are very active and need at least 14 hours of sleep. They usually move to one long afternoon nap around fifteen months.

2-3 years: Most children still nap 1-2 hours a day, in addition to 10-12 hours at night.

3-4 years: Most children still need a nap, especially during active days at the center. They sleep 10-12 hours total.

4-5 years: Children need a rest plus 10-12 hours at night.

6-9 years: Children need 10-12 hours of sleep at night.

Remember that illness or stress can temporarily cause any child to need more sleep than usual. *State law mandates a half-hour rest period for all children in care. If your 4 or 5 year-old falls asleep during this rest, it's because she's tired.*

Self-Soothing

We encourage self-soothing from an early age so infants who stir need not depend on adults to get back to sleep. Here's how we do this at the center: We place infants in their crib when they are sleepy but not overtired. They may fuss quietly or drift off to sleep. If they fuss, we peek in to make sure their diapers are clean, etc., but don't pick them up. We

let babies fuss quietly for 10-15 minutes. The fussing should decrease in intensity. If a baby objects strenuously, we take her out and try again after she is calm and if she still appears sleepy. It takes about 2-3 weeks for most babies to learn this skill, but it's a great investment for your baby **and** you.

Frequently Asked Questions

My child seems to drag at 6:30 p.m. but I want to spend more time with him. You can try gradually keeping him up, shifting bedtime later by 15 minutes every 5 days or so, but some children still prefer an early bedtime. Moving too much beyond his natural bedtime may create new difficulties getting him to bed and establish bad sleep patterns.

My child stays up too late so I don't want you to let her nap more than one hour at the center. Children get more tired at the center because they are so active. Evaluate the total amount of sleep your child gets based on her age. We can work with you to encourage a pattern that works well for everyone, but waking your child up before she's ready won't

benefit anyone as she's likely to be very cranky until bedtime. It also won't guarantee an early bedtime. In fact, being overtired causes difficulty falling asleep.

You say he *shouldn't* be hungry, but my six month-old son really seems starving when he wakes at night. The calories in nighttime feedings act as reinforcers. Try reducing the caloric content by shortening the nursing or diluting formula with water over time. Also try to ensure he gets all the calories he needs during the day.

I don't want my child to nap at the center. Please read our Naptime Purple Page for a detailed discussion of this topic.