

TIPS FOR A SMOOTHER BEDTIME ROUTINE



If you're a parent, you know the nightly challenge: to get your kids to go to bed -- and stay there!! **It's not easy**, but it's one of the most important things you can do for them.

When children don't get enough sleep, they have a harder time controlling their emotions. They may be irritable or hyper, which is no fun for anyone. Kids who are always sleep-deprived are more likely to have behavior problems, have trouble paying attention and learning, and be overweight.

So although it's not easy, it's important to do all you can to help your children get the sleep they need.

Regular schedules and bedtime rituals play a big role in helping kids get sound sleep and function at their best. When you set and maintain good sleep habits, it helps your child fall asleep, stay asleep, and awake rested and refreshed. They can help take the stress out of bedtime, too.

There are no hard-and-fast rules for bedtime, and every child is different. What's important is to build a routine that works for your family -- and to stick with it.

Here are 8 ways to get started:

1. Make sleep a family priority.

Keep a regular bedtime schedule. Set regular go-to-bed and wake-up times for the entire family and be sure to follow them -- even on weekends. You can tell that children are getting enough sleep when they fall asleep within 15 to 30 minutes of going to bed, wake up easily in the morning, and don't nod off during the day.

2. Deal with sleep troubles.

Signs of sleep struggles include trouble falling asleep, waking up at night, snoring, stalling and resisting going to bed, having trouble breathing during sleep, and loud or heavy breathing while sleeping. You might notice problems in daytime behavior, as

well. If your child seems overtired, sleepy, or cranky during the day, tell her doctor.

3. Communicate and Work as a team.

Communicate with your children. Kids will naturally push back, and getting them on a sleep schedule may be much more difficult than it sounds. It's important that you talk with your children about the reasons why they have a specified bedtime and explain how it's meant to help them feel good while they're at school. Also, make sure to establish clear rules. When going through their bedtime routine, set the limit for the number of stories you will read them, and what time lights out is.

It's also important to discuss and agree on a sleep strategy for your child with your spouse or partner beforehand and work together as a team to carry it out consistently. Otherwise, you can't expect your child to learn or change their behavior.

4. Routine, routine, routine.

Kids love it, they thrive on it, and it works. One study found that a consistent nighttime routine improved sleep in children who had mild to moderate sleep problems. It helps your child learn to be sleepy, just like reading in bed often puts adults to sleep. It can also make bedtime a special time. This will help your children associate their bedroom with good feelings and give them a sense of security and control.

There is no single routine that's right for everyone, but in general, yours should include all the things that your child needs to do before going to sleep, including brushing teeth, washing up, putting on PJs, and having a snack or drink of water. Your child may want to read a book with you, talk about the day, or hear a story. Whatever you choose to do, keep the routine short (30 minutes or less, not including a bath) and be firm about ending it when it's time to sleep. Feel free to download an editable [Bedtime Routine Chart](#).

- Begin a relaxing bedtime routine. Whatever routine you choose, it's important that it's not overly stimulating, and that you stay consistent with it. Some common routines for children include:
 - An hour or two of physical activity before dinnertime to help them wind down later.
 - A relaxing bath/shower after dinner.
 - Reading a few chapters from a book with mom and/or dad.
 - Doing nightly prayers, singing a lullaby or meditating.
 - Having mom or dad turn off the lights and saying goodnight.
 - At least an hour before bedtime all electronics should be shut off or taken away. This includes TV, video games, cell phones, computers, etc.

Not only is the content from these devices mentally stimulating, but the artificial light emitting from them tricks the brain into thinking it needs to stay awake as it associates light with daytime.

5. Dress and room temperature.

Everyone sleeps better in a room that is cool but not cold. A rule of thumb is to dress your child basically as you dress yourself, keeping in mind that very young children often kick off the covers at night and can't cover themselves.

6. Sleep environment.

Create an ideal sleep environment. Make sure their room is quiet, dimly lit, and comfortable. Some kids might also enjoy the sound of "white noise", nature sounds, relaxing music or a kid-friendly guided meditation. This will not only help block out

outside noises but will also help with kids that tend to have any worries or fear around sleeping.

Your kids should associate their bed with sleep and not other types of activities. If they enjoy relaxing in their room during the daytime, get them a beanbag chair for them to sit in as they read or play video games. That way the bed is identified strictly with sleeping.

7. Security object.

Bedtime means separation, and that can be easier for kids with a personal object, like a doll, teddy bear, or blanket. It can provide a sense of security and control that comforts and reassures your child before she falls asleep.

8. One last thing.

Kids will always ask for that one last thing -- hugs, a drink of water, a trip to the bathroom, just one more book. Do your best to head off these requests by making them part of the bedtime routine. And let your child know that once she is in bed, she has to stay in bed.

If your kids get up, don't react -- simply take them by the hand and walk them back to bed. If you argue or give in to requests, you're giving them the extra attention -- and delayed bedtime -- they want.

Don't give into the "just this one-time" pitfall. If you read one more story or let them stay up longer "just this once," the bedtime routine you've built could come undone.

Make sure you practice these tips yourself. These tips are not only beneficial to quality sleep in children, but in adults as well. Practicing these sleep habits yourself will increase your own energy during the daytime as well as set a positive example for your children.

Resources:

<https://www.alaskasleep.com/blog/back-to-school-sleep-tips-parents-teens-children>

<https://www.webmd.com/parenting/raising-fit-kids/recharge/bedtime-routine-tips#1>