

PARENT CONNECTIONS

A Newsletter for First Steps Families ♦ Fall 2011

Important Facts About Sleep and Young Children

(Reprinted with permission from St. Luke's Hospital)

The goal of improving sleep is to promote optimal alertness. A child who is overtired has a harder time falling asleep than a child who is well-rested, and the timing of sleep is often crucial. Putting a child to bed too early or too late may result in a significant delay in falling asleep.

Sleep loss is cumulative. A child who goes to bed a little late each evening or misses a nap intermittently may become significantly sleep deprived within a few days. The majority of children under age 4 years can only meet their sleep requirement by taking naps (they usually cannot obtain all their sleep at night). The symptoms of chronic insufficient sleep in the young child are often subtle and misleading. For example, he or she may appear overactive rather than tired and sleepy. Chronic and cumulative sleep loss, even for brief durations, is likely to be harmful to learning.

Children develop attitudes about nutrition and exercise at a young age. The same holds true for sleep. Sending a child to bed as punishment or allowing a late bedtime as a reward may send the wrong message. The right time can be determined by knowing your child's circadian rhythm (biological clock) of alertness and sleepiness. The rising time each morning is the best behavioral indicator of a particular child's sleep/wake rhythm. Keeping a regular schedule strengthens circadian rhythm, which in turn promotes quality sleep.

Signs of Insufficient Sleep

- ☉ Falls asleep in the car, in a highchair or when watching TV when it is not nap time.
- ☉ Frequently awakens tired and crabby in the morning and following naps.
- ☉ Seems irritable, difficult to please off and on during the day, especially between 4 and 6 p.m. (may hit, spit or bite during this time if significantly sleep deprived).
- ☉ Appears unusually clingy and will not let mom out of sight intermittently during the day, especially between 4 and 6 p.m.
- ☉ Has to be awakened most mornings, looks as if he/she could easily sleep another hour.
- ☉ Often has a very short attention span; can't sit to look at books with parent for more than a few minutes (when sleep loss is severe, appears overactive or "wired").

By Nancy Birkenmeier, BSN, RN, St. Luke's Hospital Sleep Medicine and Research Center
at: <http://www.stlsprount.com/in-the-sproutlight/important-facts-about-sleep-and-young-children-from-st-luke-s-hospital>

 Age	Average Total Sleep Time per Day (in hours)
0 - 6 months	14 - 16
6-12 months	14
1 year	13½
2 years	13
3 years	12 ½
4 years	11½ - 12
5 - 6 years	11
7 - 8 years	10 ½
9 - 11 years	10
12 - 14 years	9 ½
15 - 24 years	9
25 and older	7 ½ - 8 ½



A Missouri Family's Story

By Beth of Aurora, Mo.

I learned about First Steps when my second child was very young. I noticed he was slow to develop, so someone recommended the First Steps program to me. They came to my home to evaluate him, and he qualified to receive occupational therapy. We learned to sit with him and read for short periods of time to get him to practice sitting still. We progressed to sitting for longer periods of time as we worked with puzzles, which also helped him learn how to problem-solve. They also showed us how to stimulate his joints and use massage to help calm him down.

When my third child was about one year old, we learned she has Apraxia. My daughter received speech therapy services through First Steps until she aged out and could get help from our local school district. Since the speech therapist did not have experience with Apraxia, First Steps helped the therapist develop a program – and it worked. My daughter has come a long way with her vocabulary in just two years thanks to First Steps.

I am very pleased with this program. Without First Steps, I don't know where we would be.

JUST FOR FUN

Tips for Infant and Toddler Reading

Are you wondering how to engage your child's brain as you read with her?

Try these activities for toddlers and your child will be begging for more books!

- Snuggle with your child with her favorite blanket or toys as you read.
- Read toddlers' books with expression using different voices for different characters.
- Emphasize rhythms and rhymes in stories. Give your toddler opportunities to repeat rhyming phrases.
- Use pictures to build vocabulary by pointing to things and naming them and naming colors, too.
- Use pictures to develop speaking vocabulary by talking about what is shown.
- Encourage your child to repeat what you say or comment on it.
- Encourage your child to ask questions. Provide models of interesting questions and examples of possible answers. "I wonder what is going to happen next? I think the rabbit will get lost because he is not paying attention to where he is going. What do you think?"
- Look for books that are about things that interest your toddler. For example, does your child like cars, insects, or animals?
- Give your child a chance to choose his own books and children's bedtime stories for reading. If your child chooses a book that is too long to hold his attention, read some and skip some, discussing the pictures and how they relate to the story.
- Read stories again and again. Your toddler enjoys repetition and it helps her become familiar with the way stories are organized.



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