

Parent Resources

A Better Bedtime: Helping Your Child Sleep Well

How much sleep does your child need each night?

According to the Wall Street Journal, most parents underestimate the amount of sleep children should get. The amount of sleep recommended by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine is:

- Infants: 14 to 15 hours
- Toddlers: 12 to 14 hours
- Preschoolers: 11 to 13 hours
- School-age children: 10 to 11 hours
- Teenagers: 9 to 10 hours

It is estimated that 43 percent of all children and 86 percent of children with developmental disabilities have some type of sleep difficulty. Sleep problems can make children moody, short tempered and unable to engage in interactions with others.

Sleep problems can also impact a child's ability to learn. Plus, parents need to feel well rested so they can deal with their growing and active children.

Here are some proven hints that will help make bedtime and nap time easier for parents and children:

Establish good sleep habits

- Develop a regular time for going to bed and taking naps and a regular time to wake up.
- If possible, make sure your child has outside time and physical activity daily.

- Help your child understand the steps in the napping and bedtime routines.
- Tell your child what might happen when he wakes up.
- Allow your child to carry a favorite transition object to bed.
- Provide choices whenever possible.

Create a good sleep environment

- Provide your child with calming, rest-inducing activities, sounds or objects in the bedtime and nap-time routine.
- Put your child down for sleep while he or she is still awake.
- Avoid giving your child certain foods and drinks six hours before sleep.
- Reduce noise and distractions in and near your child's room.
- Reduce the light in your child's room.
- Make sure your child is comfortable.

Keep a sleep diary for a week

A sleep diary is a log of when the child falls asleep and wakes up and the total amount of time asleep. Since some children are erratic in their sleep patterns, keeping a sleep diary will give you a clear picture of your child's sleep patterns.

- Write comments about what events happened that day.
- Write comments about how your child slept.

Look for signs of sleepiness

- Signs of being tired may include

yawning, difficulty focusing, turning away from objects and people, and rubbing eyes or nose. Other signs are losing interest in play, not following directions, being aggressive or becoming grumpy.

Talk to your child about his fears

A child might be scared of something in his room and be unable to tell you how he feels.

- If your child expresses fear of something, first, let him know you understand his fears by saying you know he is feeling scared.
- Next, reassure or comfort your child and let him know that you will protect him. For example, say, "That box is making a scary shadow. I'll move it."
- Let your child know you are nearby if he needs you.

Celebrate the successes along the way

- Acknowledge all successes no matter how small.
- Tell your child that he is doing a good job.

Remember, when your child is having a restful nap or bedtime sleep, you can get more rest, too.

Source: www.challengingbehavior.org