

# Top Tips for Improving Sleep In Kids

## Is My Child Getting Enough Sleep?

How many hours of sleep your child needs is individual to them. Some kids need more sleep, while others need less. If your child a) falls asleep within 20 minutes of going to bed; b) wakes without any trouble in the morning, and; c) does not require a daytime nap (where developmentally appropriate), these are good signs that they're receiving adequate sleep.

## Rule Out Physiological + Psychological Conditions

Childhood sleep can be adversely affected by breathing difficulties, colic, allergies, periodic leg movement and sleep apnoea, as well as, separation anxiety, fear of the dark or nightmares. If you think your child is struggling to sleep well because of a physiological or psychological condition, speak to your GP but also carry out these tips to promote healthy sleep habits.

## Falling Asleep Alone: Self Regulation

Research consistently demonstrates that children who are able to fall asleep and re-settle on their own after night waking are better sleepers. Establishing a predictable bedtime routine which encourages your child to fall asleep (in less than 20 minutes) without relying on you will assist your child to develop important self-regulatory skills that will allow your child to re-settle during the night. Children who can self-regulate have longer undisturbed bouts of sleep and improved mental, behavioural and emotional functioning.

## Napping

Daytime naps are necessary for development during childhood. The number and length of daytime naps decline as children develop. By 3-5 years of age children will stop needing naps.

## Bedtime Routine

Try to get your child into bed and up in the morning at roughly the same time each day - a regular sleep-wake cycle will help to regulate your child's circadian rhythms. Avoid engaging in stimulating activities near bedtime or using the bed for non-sleep-related activities (e.g. playing, watching television, time out). Develop a consistent, calming bedtime routine involving storytelling and taking a bath, and leave your child alone to fall asleep. If your child becomes distressed return to the room and reassure your child that you believe they can fall asleep without you and leave again. Doing this will help your child learn self-soothing skills.

## Be Consistent

If your child leaves their bedroom after lights out, ignore their requests and gently lead them back to their bed without conversation. If your child refuses to go back to bed, gently carry them.

If your child comes into your bedroom in the middle of the night, return them to their bed. Settle your child quickly and leave the room

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TOP TIPS

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## Childhood Sleep

Sleep problems are one of the most common issues faced by parents. In fact **30% of all parents report that at least one of their children:**

- Has trouble falling asleep at night
- Wakes through the night and can't return to sleep without parent intervention

Chronic sleep problems are exhausting for parents and they can also affect a child's:

- Emotional resilience
- Physical health
- Concentration
- Memory
- Level of alertness during the day
- Daytime energy levels
- Behaviour

Most sleep problems are caused by either challenging behaviour at bedtime or lagging skills in self-regulation which may be longstanding or can be triggered by:

- Illness
- Going on holidays
- Moving house
- Family conflict
- Starting school

The good news is that the underlying causes of childhood sleep problems are solvable - parents can help kids learn the behaviour needed for a good night's sleep.

The strategies covered in this tips sheet can help to improve your child's sleep. If the problem persists, seek the advice of a child clinical psychologist.