

Making Bedtime Fun



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Bedtime can be a difficult time of day for your child and can be stressful for everyone involved.

Sleep is important for your child's development and learning. There are ways to make the bedtime routine a fun but calming time for both you and your child, which will encourage a great night's sleep.

A note on Screens

Having screens off for the hour before bedtime helps children to calm down. This includes phones, tablets, and the TV. Screens give off blue light that disrupts your child's sleep-wake cycle. It does not help children settle.

You could use the first part of this hour to play with your child, starting with something active then quieting down as you start the bedtime routine.

Some activities you could do in this hour before bed are:

- Head outside for half an hour and let some energy out.
- Puzzles.
- Colouring in.
- Bubbles. This is also a calming breathing exercise.
- Read books.

The amount of sleep needed by children differs. As a general estimate, toddlers need **11-14 hours** every 24 hours. This is often split between a long sleep at night and a 1-2-hour nap during the day. Preschoolers need **10-13 hours** per night¹. Some preschoolers still nap during the day for about an hour, but many have stopped napping by this age.

Before you start

A consistent routine before bedtime can help your child settle well for the night. This ensures your child knows what happens next and will help them feel safe and secure. This is likely to lead to better sleep.

Bedtime can also be a great time to bond. For some children, being separated from parents overnight is a cause for anxiety, so making sure you have quality time just before bed will help them feel secure.

Earlier in the day, making sure your child has lots of time to be active and see sunlight will help them sleep better.

¹ [Sleep & sleep cycles: babies, kids, teens | Raising Children Network](#)

Routine

Think about what time you would like your child to fall asleep. Aim to start the bedtime routine about 30 minutes before this time.

If the time your child goes to sleep is significantly different to your ideal, start implementing the new routine by bringing that time 15 minutes earlier every few days until you get to your ideal bedtime. For example, your child goes to bed at 9pm but you would like them to go at 7:30, start by aiming for them to be settled in bed by 8:45 and bring it earlier by 15 minutes each night until you get to 7:30.

Try to keep the routine the same each night, including weekends. Children will take longer to adjust if the routine is different some nights.

A simple routine could be:

- Bath
- Pyjamas
- Brush teeth
- Read stories, sing lullabies, or listen to calming music together
- Hug goodnight and tuck into bed



Keeping it enjoyable for all.

These ideas support your child to enjoy the routine, feel settled, and even learn new skills.

- Offer choices. This will help with your child's sense of independence and may make them more compliant. These choices should be both options you are happy with, e.g., a choice of which pyjamas to wear, which books to read or songs to sing.
- Ensure you have clear boundaries before you start which stay the same each night, so the routine goes for the right amount of time. E.g., two stories then it's sleep time.
- You could give your child a massage using calming lotion before tucking them in.
- As you tuck your child in, spend some time talking about your day together. Instead of asking them a lot of questions, remind them about some of the fun things they did. Or talk about some of the things you did that day.
- Make sure your child's pyjamas are not irritating. Cut off tags that may be scratchy.





Remember, getting into new habits is hard, for both you and your child. Try to keep to a routine for at least two weeks before deciding if it is working for you.

Environment

How the bedroom looks and feels can significantly affect sleep.

- Use dim lighting in your child's room to prepare them for sleep. Some children are scared of complete dark, in which case you might want to consider a dim nightlight. You could try a sleep training clock. These clocks glow a different colour depending on whether it's time to be asleep or time to wake up in the morning.
- Try for no screens in the bedroom.
- Diffusing relaxing essential oils such as lavender can create a calming scent in the room.
- White noise can help children settle. Set this up so it can play all night, that way it is still going if your child wakes up during the night.
- Make sure the room is not too warm or cold, and your child has a comfortable number of blankets.



A bedtime box

With your child's involvement, create a box of special calming things that your child only has access to at bedtime. You could include

- A blanket or soft toy your child likes to cuddle.
- Comfortable pyjamas
- Massage cream

A transitional object

Lots of children like to have something to cuddle that they associate with bedtime. This could be a teddy or small blanket. This can be helpful as it will still be there if they wake up during the night and may help them to settle again.



Visual schedule

Many children respond well to knowing what comes next in their routine. A way to help them with this is to use a visual schedule.

As you complete each step you can refer to it to promote independence as your child works out what to do next.



Opportunities for learning

Pretend play during the day can be a way to reinforce this routine and for your child to continue learning.

- You could brush the teeth of their favourite toy
- You could give their doll a bath.

Reading stories during the day as well as at bedtime is a great way to support your child's learning.

Further Resources

Check out the links below for further ideas for if your child gets up after going to bed:

[Sleep & children 3-5 years: what to expect | Raising Children Network](#)

[Kids' sleep: answers to 20 FAQs | Raising Children Network](#)

[Creating a Soothing Bedtime Routine - 7 Tips to Meet the Challenge \(sleep lady.com\)](#)

[17 Calming Activities Before Bedtime - Harmony Learning](#)

You could also:

- Ask your Start Strong Pathways Educator to help. They can help with making visuals and planning how to implement a bedtime routine.

- Does your child have an Occupational Therapist? Let them know you are working on making bedtime a more engaging time with your child. Check in with them about some further strategies for your child or for other resources.
- Does your child have a Speech Pathologist? They can help you with visuals as well as other resources to engage your child during the bedtime routine.

References

[Infant and Toddler Sleep Basics 101 April ToT 2021 - YouTube](#)

[How Does Blue Light Affect Children's Sleep? | Sleep Foundation](#)

[Toddlers sleep | Raising Children Network](#)

[Kids' sleep: answers to 20 FAQs | Raising Children Network](#)

[Sleep & sleep cycles: babies, kids, teens | Raising Children Network](#)

[Creating a Soothing Bedtime Routine - 7 Tips to Meet the Challenge \(sleep lady.com\)](#)