



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Parenting the
Preschooler



Sleep

Why is sleep important?

- Sleep helps preschoolers learn.
- Sleep helps bones, muscles, and skin grow.
- Sleep helps a child's body recover.
- Sleep promotes healthy brain growth.
- Preschoolers need 11-13 hours of sleep.

Bedtime Routine Tips

- Have a consistent bedtime and stick to it whenever possible; choose and plan the routine that works best for your family. Follow the same routine every night. For example, a typical bedtime routine might look like this: story, goodnight kiss, lights off, eyes closed for sleep. When you follow the same routine every night children will more readily accept the final steps.
- Give your child choices on pajamas or other small choices.
- Include a wind down time about a half hour before bed, activities like reading books, taking a warm bath or time to snuggle and talk assist in transitions.
- If your child gets up, leaves the room or calls for you, offer comfort, but do not become a source of entertainment. Say "I love you," then put your child back to bed. Repeat these steps until the child is ready to stay in bed.
- If you are hoping to change sleep patterns ask for help from another adult and step away if you are feeling distress. Habits take time and consistency to form.

Misbehavior: Could Sleep be the Culprit?

Is your child irritable? Having trouble making decisions or controlling emotions? Having trouble following rules or getting along with others? If so, your child might not be getting enough sleep! Although these behaviors could have other causes, lack of sleep is stressful for children's bodies and minds. Without enough sleep, children are often less flexible, more emotional, and less focused.



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Guidelines to help your child sleep better

- Limit food and drink before bedtime; avoiding stimulants (like caffeine).
- Tuck your child in while he or she is sleepy, but still awake.
- You cannot force a child to sleep, but you can have a rule that they must stay in bed quietly

Frequently Asked Questions

Should I wait to put children to bed after they've fallen asleep?

No, instead put them to bed while they are drowsy. This will support your child learning to fall asleep on their own.

Should I let my children nap? (I thought this would keep them up at night!)

In some cases, napping can help children regulate better. Every child is different and this is one of those cases that you should pay attention to what your own child needs. As children transition to decreased naps, this is an excellent time to introduce quiet time.

Set the Stage

Just like adults, children have different preferences on what makes their bodies comfortable. Not all of these suggestions will work for your family. Keep testing them out until you find the one that works. Test out some of our suggestions:

- Make your child's bedroom cozy.
- Use the bed only for sleeping, not watching TV or playing videogames.
- Play soft, soothing music or create white noise with a fan.
- Keep the bedroom cool and dark at bedtime.

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