

Bedtime

Some steps for parents to follow to help children get the right amount of sleep and avoid problems around bedtime. By **Annette Rawstrone**



Getting a good night's sleep for your child, and ultimately yourself, is often something that parents dream of. But by settling your child into a consistent bedtime routine it can become a reality and you can even have some time to yourself to recharge.

IMPORTANCE OF SLEEP

Sleep is essential for our survival:

■ Inadequate sleep can impair brain function, but good sleep supports cognition, concentration, productivity and performance. It can help improve problem-solving skills and aid memory.



- Some physiological processes occur primarily while we're asleep, such as muscle growth, release of growth hormone and tissue repair.
- Poor sleep can lead to poor behaviour and hyperactivity.

SLEEPING HOURS

The amount of sleep that your child needs will change as they get older. The NHS recommends that babies and children have the following approximate hours of sleep:

- **3 months** Daytime: four to five hours / Night time: 10 to 11 hours
- **6 months** Daytime: three hours / Night time: 11 hours
- **9 months** Daytime: two

hours, 30 mins / Night time: 11 hours

- **12 months** Daytime: two hours, 30 mins / Night time: 11 hours
- **3 years** Daytime: none to 45 mins / Night time: 11 hours, 30 mins to 12 hours
- **4 years** Night time: 11 hours, 30 mins
- **5 years** Night time: 11 hours

SETTING A BEDTIME

Having a set bedtime helps your child to get a good night's sleep and enables them to function. Establishing a bedtime routine for your child has many benefits:

- It will signal to your child that it's time to rest and help



them to fall asleep, stay asleep and wake up rested.

- The familiarity is comforting and can help your child relax and ease separation anxiety.
- It helps your child to learn how to transition from the busy day, soothe themselves and settle for sleep.
- It can help prevent children from developing sleep problems in the future.
- According to a study by University College London, children with irregular bedtimes were found to experience behavioural problems, such as emotional difficulties and hyperactivity. This was attributed to natural body rhythms being disrupted, which can cause sleep deprivation.
- It can actually take the stress out of putting your child to bed and help it to become a special time for you both.

ROUTINE TIPS

Every family is unique and has different needs, but doing the same relaxing things in the same order and at the same time each night can help to promote a good night's sleep:

- When it's approaching bedtime, an hour before if possible, make the home environment as calm as possible. So turn off loud music, any TVs or other screens and avoid rough and tumble games.
- Try to keep bedrooms screen-free zones. The



backlighting on screens awakens the brain and can confuse the circadian rhythms, which are responsible for telling us when we need to go to sleep.

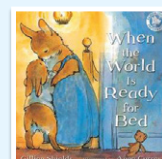
- Avoid giving your child large amounts of food before bed which can disrupt their sleep.
- If there is time, a warm bath – not hot – can help soothe a child and signal it's time to rest, followed by cleaning their teeth and putting on nightwear.
- Ensure your child's bedroom is conducive to sleep by having it dark – which encourages your child's body to produce the sleep hormone melatonin – and at a comfortable temperature, around 18 to 24°C. Consider investing in blackout blinds or a nightlight, depending on your child's preference.
- Introduce a lovely snuggly bedtime story to help your child to relax before bed.

Sharing a book together

promotes a bond between you and your child by giving you relaxed one-to-one time in a calm environment. It can also help your child to develop a love of books as they associate reading with a pleasant, positive experience.

- Dim the lights and chat to your child about their day or what the plans are for tomorrow to help put any worries to rest and help them prepare for sleep before kissing them 'night night'.
- If you've tried all these tips but are still having problems settling your child to sleep, consider seeking advice from your key person, health visitor or GP. They may refer you to a sleep expert for additional support. ■

story time



When the World is Ready for Bed by Gillian Shields

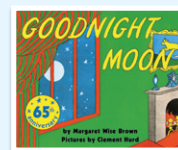
As the whole world gets ready for bed, so does a family of bunnies – brushing teeth, closing curtains and sharing a story.

Kiss Good Night by Amy Hest and Anita Jeram



Hest and Anita Jeram

On a rainy, windy night, Mummy Bear tucks in Baby Bear, reads a story and brings hot milk. Only one thing is missing.



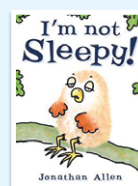
Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd

Bunny says goodnight to familiar things, one by one – a bedtime classic that has lulled generations of children to sleep.



Bedtime with Ted by Sophy Henn

Ted is too busy for bed – he's cleaning his teeth with a crocodile and bathing with some penguins.



I'm not Sleepy! by Jonathan Allen

Baby Owl insists he's not tired. He's not yawning; he's just bored.

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