

CHILDREN AND SLEEP



Some children have to learn good sleeping habits, but they are very important for both you and your child.

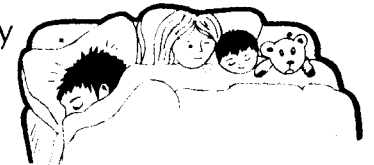
This leaflet contains some ideas about how to encourage good sleeping habits.

You can't make a child go to sleep, but you can help him* to have good feelings about going to bed.

Every child varies in the amount of sleep he needs.

IT'S NORMAL:

- ★ for a child not to want to go to bed when you want him to.
- ★ for a baby who has been sleeping through the night to wake up crying at odd hours.
- ★ for a toddler to wake at midnight and want to talk and play.
- ★ for a young child to be ready to start the day at 5 am.
- ★ for a child frightened by a bad dream or just feeling lonely to creep into your bed with you.



Problems start because most children need less sleep than parents want them to have. If we're honest, we want children to sleep ALL NIGHT for our sake, not for theirs. We NEED the rest from them. It's impossible to keep going 24 hours a day.

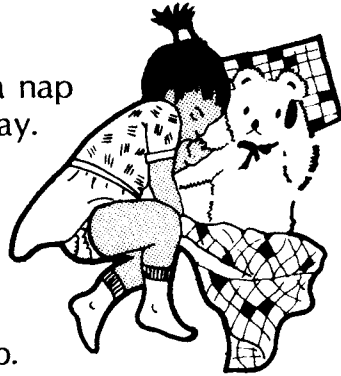
* For ease and clarity, "he" is used throughout the text.

Naps

If your child is drowsy, let him have a nap preferably in the earlier part of the day.

Not all children need a nap, and some may need 2.

If you are planning on a 7 pm bed time, try to avoid a tea time nap.



■■■■ TODDLERS ■■■■

Sleep problems in young children are very common. They often arise because of changes in routine due to moving house, birth of another baby, or illness. If the routine is disturbed, you may have to start again, with a new routine.

The following ideas may help:

★ YOU COULD TRY

- ★ a bed time story.
- ★ favourite toys in bed.



★ AGREEMENT BETWEEN PARENTS

It is important to decide on a plan which both parents are happy with. Both parents should use the plan, so that the child sees that you are together on this. It is unlikely to work if parents do not support each other.

★ STICK TO YOUR PLAN

Start as you mean to go on. It will take more than a few nights for a child to learn new habits.

Don't try a plan you know you might not be able to keep to.

IMPORTANT - if you want your child to behave in a certain way then you must set the rules and stick to them.

The toddler who won't go to bed

Bed time should be a happy and relaxed time, not a punishment.

Boisterous romps just before bed time don't exhaust children but make them more excited.

A routine bedtime spent quietly together makes a child feel happy and secure. A child who feels cheated out of this attention can make countless more demands after bed time.

However, when you have been through the bed time routine, try to make it clear that there are no more excuses to bring you back.

■■■■■ BABIES ■■■■■

ROUTINE

A bed time routine is very important and encourages a child to fall asleep easily.

It should be as calm and settling as possible - try using a softer "going-to-sleep" voice when putting your child to bed.

A routine could include:

- ★ having a bath
- ★ having a feed.
- ★ a special quiet song
- ★ a last cuddle



Decide which room your baby will spend the night in. Settle your baby in this room, rather than letting him fall asleep on the settee.

It is a good idea to put your baby in his cot when he is drowsy rather than fully asleep. This will help him to learn to fall asleep on his own.

Night time feeds

Make a regular routine of "back-to-bed" after night time feeds.

After about 6 months old, a baby should not need a feed or drink during the night. Try to stop night feeds or drinks around this age, before they become habits which are difficult to break.

Ask yourself if you really want to be getting up during the night for the next few years!

Settling and comforting

Babies vary in how much they cry.

A prompt but quiet and confident manner will help to comfort a crying baby.



These ideas might help:

- ★ go to the cot promptly.
- ★ if you use a dummy, replace it.
- ★ pat the baby gently and make soothing noises.
- ★ leave the baby for a few minutes then return and comfort again, if necessary.
- ★ repeat this comforting and leaving until your baby settles.

Avoid:

- ★ leaving your baby to cry for a long time.
- ★ picking your baby up as soon as he cries, as he may learn to cry just to be lifted up.

Set a regular bed time. If your child is going to bed late, try bringing the time forward by 1/4 hour each night.

If your child is upset when you leave, try waiting a few minutes before going back. Tuck him up quietly and leave again. Repeat this "checking" until your child settles.

A dim light might help if your child is afraid of the dark.

Children who keep getting out of bed

There is only one simple answer - take them back. You may have to take them back many times the first few nights. They will gradually get the idea.

If you allow your child to come downstairs or into your bed, he may want to do it every night. Ask yourself if this is what you want.

A child who wakes and cries

Children and adults wake sometimes during the night, but usually fall asleep again and won't remember having woken.



If your child wakes and cries, check for discomfort or nightmares.

To encourage settling, tuck him up and leave. If necessary return after a few minutes and repeat until he settles.

Most sleep problems are attempts to gain parents attention.

It is up to you to decide what limits to set on what attention the child gets. If these ideas don't work, your health visitor will be happy to discuss any sleep problems with you.

