

# Learning About Bedtime Routines for Children

## Why are sleep and a bedtime routine important?

Children between 3 and 12 years old need about 9 to 13 hours of sleep to grow and develop. Children may have trouble learning and developing socially if they do not get enough sleep. They may be tired during the day and not able to pay attention in school.

As your child gets older, you will probably notice changes in their sleep patterns. Your child may want a nap one day and resist the nap another day. Sometimes children refuse to go to sleep as a way to show their independence. At other times, they may simply need extra attention or reassurance before they feel safe and comfortable enough to sleep well.

The best thing you can do to help your child get enough sleep is to have a bedtime routine. Doing the same things in the same order every night helps children know what to expect.

Having a bedtime routine for your child also helps you. If your child is sleeping well, you'll have fewer worries and may also sleep well.

## How can you get started?

- Set up a bedtime routine to help your child get ready for bed and sleep. For example, read together, cuddle, and listen to soft music for 15 to 30 minutes before turning out the lights. Do things in the same order each night so your child knows what to expect.
  - Have your child go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning.
  - Keep your child's bedroom quiet, dark or dimly lit, and cool. You may need to remove the TV, computer, telephone, or electronic games from the room to avoid problems with bedtime.
  - Limit activities that stimulate your child, such as playing and watching television, in the hours closer to bedtime.
  - Limit eating and drinking near bedtime.
- Encourage your child to be active each day. Your child may like to take a walk with you, ride a bike, or play sports.

## What do you do if your child has trouble sleeping?

- If your child wakes up and calls for you in the middle of the night, make your response the same each time. Offer quick comfort, but then leave the room.
- Avoid reading scary stories and watching scary programs. Scary stories and programs can cause your child to worry.
- Do not try to wake your child during a night terror. Instead, reassure and hold your child to prevent injury. During a night terror, your child may scream while sleeping, and then once awake, may not remember crying or what caused it.
- If your child sleepwalks, keep the windows and doors locked during sleep time.
- If your child is overweight, set goals for managing their weight. Being overweight can cause sleep problems or make them worse.
- If your doctor prescribes medicine, have your child take it exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if your child has any problems with a medicine.