

PARENT INFORMATION SHEET

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Sleep for Toddlers

REMEMBER:

- *Poor sleep has a negative influence on both children and parents*
- *Toddlers sleep can present many challenges*
- *Parents need to be determined and persistent with any technique they use to have the best chance of success*

Toddlers who don't sleep can be the cause of great stress to their parents. Parents who have not had enough sleep tend to be irritable and less patient.

WHAT IS A SLEEP PROBLEM?

A sleep problem is generally characterised by the effect it has on the family, rather than the number of times a child wakes up at night. What appears to one family to be a massive sleep problem may not be a concern to another family. To solve a sleep problem, parents need to be determined and willing to make the effort involved.

The key to solutions for issues with sleep is to find what works for your child and your family. Some strategies will work very successfully for one family where they will not for another.

The techniques described in this sheet are suggestions and ideas for you to try for 3 common sleep problems that you may experience.

BEDTIME PROBLEMS

Some toddlers can become very inventive at delaying bedtime! They are deeply involved in what they are doing or enjoying family life, so going to bed is not a priority. This can leave you feeling frustrated as you may not get time to yourself in the evening.

Have a Routine

Follow a routine for bed time every night. It is a good idea to establish routines for children such as a regular bed-time, and stick to it whenever possible. A child is more likely to co-operate when they have the security of a predictable routine.

Proudly managed by



Have a Later Bed Time (temporarily)

If you want to have your child asleep by 7pm but he never settles before 10pm, it is pointless to put him down at that early hour. Try putting him to bed at around 9pm to start with. Once a proper sleep pattern has been established, then bed-time is brought forward 15 minutes each night. Gradually a normal bedtime is achieved.

Soothe Your Child

Avoid your toddler getting over-excited before bed. Many parents find that reading a book is a pleasant, relaxing time together, and helps settle them down. Other soothing methods can help such as teddy, dim night lights and soft music.

Don't Give Up

Put your child in bed firmly and decisively

When your child is put to bed you must be strong and calm in your determination. Once the child is in bed and the settling routine is over, parents must leave quickly. If they call out for no reason, let them know that bed time means being quiet and lying still.

If a child comes out of their room once they have been put to bed, return them firmly and at once. Do not get angry or make a fuss - just simply take them back, and tell them it is time for bed

If they come out again, get your partner to put them back if both parents are present. This is often effective, as it gives a strong message that both parents are united in your determination to keep them in bed. You might find it useful to watch the door of the bedroom, heading them back to bed as soon as they leave the room.

Continue with this method, which may take 20 times the first night, 18 the second night, 15 the next night, etc.

You will need to be consistent with this over several weeks. Gradually you will see that your child learns that coming out is soon followed by going back in, so there becomes little point in coming out.

Some parents find that it is helpful to sit (silently) with the child in their room until they fall asleep. No eye contact is given and no discussion takes place. However, for some children this will delay their ability to stay in bed and fall asleep on their own.

WAKING DURING THE NIGHT

Being woken up in the middle of the night by a toddler can be very difficult and stressful for parents. However, it can be managed so that it doesn't become a habit.

Comfort Settling

The 'comfort settling' method uses short periods of crying, with parents leaving the child to cry for a few minutes before coming in to comfort the child.

The length of time you should leave the child to cry is up to you, depending on how strong you are feeling - it can feel quite disturbing at first to let your child cry. At least 3 minutes and no more than 10 minutes is what is recommended as being most effective.

Leaving children to cry for more than 10 minutes may not be helpful, as the child may become fearful and hysterical. It is your determination to be caring but firm and to give only minimal comfort when you go to the child that decides how successful this technique is.

Briefly comfort

Try not to pick the child up or cuddle them but attempt to calm and reassure your child in the cot. As the crying eases, tell your child "it's time for bed now. Mummy and Daddy are nearby, night, night" And leave the room.

Increase the Time between Return Visits

Increase periods of crying by 5 mins each time. This time leave them for a couple of minutes longer than the previous occasion. Then repeat the pattern above, going in to reassure your child. The next time they cry, an additional 5 minutes is added, and so on until your child settles.

Stay Firm

If a child wakes up again, either the same night or the next night, be determined from the beginning. On each waking you need to be firm, starting the comfort settling technique again. This method has worked for many thousands of parents!

WHOSE BED?

Many parents wish their bed to be a private and peaceful place and do not want to share their bed with their child. Parents sometimes make an exception when a child is sick, but find it is hard to then change the habit once their health has returned to normal.

Choose a time when you know you will be able to be consistent over a number of nights.

Direct Them Back to Bed

The moment the child appears, gently take your child back to their own room with just a few loving and caring words to let them know they must stay in bed now.

If the child returns, give a clear warning and, if possible, have the other parent return them to bed.

Each time the child comes in calmly return them to their bed. Your consistency is what will make the difference!

You may find that you are doing this very often the first night, a little less the second night, even less the third night and so on.

Continue this until your child learns that coming into your bed will always be followed by immediate return to their own bed.

Most parents find that this method will work in two or three weeks, with the child forming a new habit of staying in his own bed at night.

PARTNERS

If you have a partner or support person, it is best to work together with them on sleep problems.

Some parents have different approaches to such issues, and your child may become confused. This inconsistency does not help end the problem.

If this is the case, it is worth trying to talk it over and come to an agreement about the best approach. If this is not possible, try letting just one parent manage the behaviour until it settles. Using one approach will mean that your child learns new habits more quickly.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

If your child's difficulties do not respond to these ideas, you may require individual, professional help. Do not hesitate to ask.

Some ideas in this sheet are from 'Toddler Taming' by Dr. Christopher Green, Doubleday 1993