



Understanding and Dealing with a Child not Sleeping.

Understanding

Many of young children find it difficult to settle down to sleep and will wake up during the night.

Every child is different, so only do what you feel comfortable with and what you think will suit your child.

It can take lots of patience, consistency and commitment, but most children's sleep problems can be overcome.

NHS guidelines suggest the following hours of sleep for children:

- Children 3 to 5 years - 10-13 hours of sleep, including naps
- Children 6 to 12 years - 9-12 hours of sleep
- Teenagers 13 to 18 years - 8-10 hours of sleep

A child's lack of sleep can lead to them being unable to concentrate in school. It can impact on their ability to be creative, their behaviour and mood.

It can also have an impact on the whole family.

Dealing with child not sleeping.

GENERAL TIPS FOR HAVING HEALTHY SLEEP HYGIENE¹⁴²



Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day (even on the weekends!)



Don't go to bed feeling hungry, but also don't eat a heavy meal right before bed



Avoid caffeine consumption (e.g., coffee, soft drinks, chocolate) starting in the late afternoon



Develop a relaxing routine before bedtime – ideas include bathing, music, and reading



Expose yourself to bright light in the morning – sunlight helps the biological clock to reset itself each day



Reserve your bedroom for sleeping only – keep cell phones, computers, televisions and video games out of your bedroom



Make sure your bedroom is conducive to sleep – it should be dark, quiet, comfortable, and cool



Exercise regularly during the day



Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillow



Don't have pets in your bedroom

Strategies

As a parent - The first rule is to be patient!

Above is a visual showing tips for healthy sleep hygiene and part of this is a bedtime routine. Below is a suggested bedtime routine that can be adapted for you and your child's needs. The most important thing with any routine until it is embedded, is consistency.

- 1. Home from school.**
- 2. Snack**
- 3. Play outside of physical activity.**
- 4. Homework.**
- 5. Mealtime.**
- 6. Homework/playtime.**
- 7. Screens off. (At least 1 preferably 2 hours before bedtime. *(The, natural or artificial, especially blue lights in screens, inhibits/stops production of melatonin. This makes you feel and stay awake).*)**
- 8. Quiet play and snack if needed. Time to talk. *(Encourage children to talk about the good things that have happened during the day and wait for worries to come out naturally).***
- 9. Bath and pyjamas *(half an hour before bed).***
- 10. Get into bed.**
- 11. Story/self-reading.**
- 12. Leave child to settle to sleep.**

If your child will not go to sleep without you

This technique can help children get used to going to sleep without you in the room.

It can also be used whenever your child wakes in the middle of the night.

Be prepared for your child to take a long time to settle when you first start.

- Put your child to bed when they're drowsy but awake, then kiss them goodnight.
- Promise to go back in a few moments to give them another kiss.
- Return almost immediately to give a kiss.
- Take a few steps to the door, then return immediately to give a kiss.
- Promise to return in a few moments to give them another kiss.
- Put something away or do something in the room then give them a kiss.
- As long as the child stays in bed, keep returning to give more kisses.
- Do something outside their room and return to give kisses.
- If the child gets out of bed, say: "Back into bed and I'll give you a kiss".
- Keep going back often to give kisses until they're asleep.
- Repeat every time your child wakes during the night.

More helpful tips:

- Make sure you have a calming, predictable bedtime routine that happens at the same time and includes the same things every night.
- If your child complains that they're hungry at night, try giving them a bowl of cereal and milk before bed (make sure you brush their teeth afterwards).
- If your child is afraid of the dark, consider using a nightlight or leaving a landing light on.
- If your child wakes up during the night, be as boring as possible – leave lights off, avoid eye contact and do not talk to them more than necessary.
- If your child has difficulty sleeping, wake them at the same time every morning, even at the weekends, until they follow a regular sleep and waking pattern.

Suggested Reading for parents

The Incredible Years – Carolyn Webster-Stratton

The Book You Wish Your Parents Had Read (and Your Children Will Be Glad That You Did)

by [Philippa Perry](#).

Teach Your Child to Sleep: Sleep solutions from birth through childhood

by [Millpond Children's Sleep Clinic](#)

Books to share with your child

What to Do When You Dread Your Bed: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Problems with Sleep (What-to-Do Guides for Kids) (What-to-Do Guides for Kids (R))

by [Dawn Huebner](#) and [Bonnie Matthews](#)

The 3 Minute Gratitude Journal for Kids: A Journal to Teach Children to Practice Gratitude and Mindfulness

by [Modern Kid Press](#)



Bedtime Reward Chart (example)

Eg. can just be 1 or 2	Screens off (at least 1 hour before bed)	Bath teeth and PJs on	Get into Bed	Story or self -reading	Say goodnight Stay in bed 10 mins	Stay in bed 20 mins.	30 mins	Total
Mon								
Tues								
Weds								
Thurs								
Fri								
Week total								

This is just an example. Start with the particular problem you want to address first e.g. clean your teeth, say goodnight and stay in bed for increased increments of time.

Tips for Making a Bedtime Reward Chart.

- Discuss what and how the reward chart will work, with your child, when they are relaxed and calm.
- Get their agreement and let them help design and decorate it. Child will buy into it more easily.
- Give a tick for each achievement each night.
- Offer a small incentive to start with eg. For 4 out of 8 ticks or more an extra story or stay up an extra 10 mins.
- Do **not** take ticks or incentives away. They may think not worth carrying on with and give up.
- Don't give up it will take a while to see results but will work if you are consistent.
- Give lots of praise for each achievement don't dwell on things that don't go well.
- It can start with just one or two targets especially for younger children or children having real difficulty sleeping eg. Sleeping in their own bed, getting into bed and staying in bed.
- Offer a larger reward, at the end of the week for a certain amount of ticks achieved. Don't make it too many or again it will be too difficult to maintain.
- A small sand timer or a music track, played as a timer, is helpful if your child uses stalling tactics.
- Involve the whole family and teacher/teaching assistants. Praise your child, even for the smallest of steps achieved, in your child's earshot.

