



x SafeSleepSpace^{SSS}

Predictability & consistency is key: *Do I really need a sleep?*

2 YEARS – 5 YEARS

EARLY YEARS SLEEP GUIDE SERIES: FIVE





If you are contemplating whether or not your toddler or preschooler still needs a sleep or if you are unsure at all, then read on!

It is common for parents to wonder whether or not their developing toddler/preschooler requires a daytime sleep. Short answer — many will!

Sleep is vital for your toddler or pre-schooler’s normal growth and healthy development. When your child has adequate quality sleep across the 24 hour period, you will also find that they are far more settled and happier during the day. Many pre-schoolers may fluctuate between a nap on one day and not the next, so it is important to remain flexible to your child’s needs.

Getting the right amount of sleep also strengthens your child’s immune system and can therefore reduce their risk of illness.



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How much sleep at this age?

By about 2 years of age, toddlers need 11–14 hours of sleep every 24 hours where one 2-3 hour nap is quite normal, with a shorter nap occasionally.

Children aged 3-5 years need 10–13 hours of sleep a night. Some might also have a day nap of about an hour. At this age some pre-schoolers might be able to make it through the day without a sleep at all but many, especially 3 year olds, will generally be very tired by the evening!

Sleep cycle

Your toddler or pre-schooler's sleep cycle is now almost certainly 60 minutes in duration; remembering a young baby has a sleep cycle of 35-45 minutes and an adult sleep cycle is 90–120 minutes. [See more on Sleep Charts.](#)

It's not uncommon as parents to ask..."Should I wake my toddler or pre-schooler so they don't sleep too long in the afternoon?"

If you are considering this, be cautious about waking a toddler or pre-schooler midway through their sleep cycle – that is, when they are in deep, non-REM sleep.

Waking a toddler at this stage will likely result in a very cranky child who is still tired. And we know that an overtired toddler is less likely to settle well at night-time.

Remember — sleep promotes sleep. So it's best to let the toddler complete their nap or at the very least, complete a full sleep cycle before waking them.

Cot to bed safety and safe sleeping

Most children move from a cot to a bed sometime between 2 and 3½ years. It is however perfectly safe for them to stay in their cot if they are happy and show no signs of climbing.

If however, your child starts to climb out of the cot – it's time to make the transition. And immediately!

Guidelines also state that a port-a-cot is unsafe if a child weighs more than 15kg.

The transition to a bed and the increase in a toddler's mobility at sleep time, also brings about a number of important safety considerations.



Here's some safe sleeping suggestions:

1. Use a mattress on the floor or a toddler bed.
2. Choose a firm, flat mattress. Keep the bed or mattress on the floor away from walls to reduce suffocation risk.
3. Keep pillows out of the bed or mattress on the floor, for children under two years – pillows are a suffocation risk for young children
4. Keep the area around the mattress clear of soft toys, bean bags, plastic bags or similar objects that a young child can roll onto. Soft objects could mould around a young child's face, resulting in suffocation.
5. Keep dangling cords, strings and mobiles out of reach as they could get caught around a child's neck.
6. Keep heaters, electrical appliances and access to power points well away to avoid the risk of overheating, burns and electrocution.
7. Ensure all furniture and TVs are attached with wall brackets so they cannot be readily tipped over.
8. Ensure stairs and windows are not accessible.

9. Pay special attention to any other potential hazards that may result in falls, drowning, strangulation, entrapment or poisoning.
10. If your toddler/ child is in a sleeping bag whilst sleeping outside of a cot, please be careful! A child wearing a sleeping bag and not confined to a cot is at a higher risk of falling and being injured. The child must be actively supervised, and the sleeping bag removed as soon as the child wakes.
11. Use an age appropriate sleep suit or pyjamas – [see the ergoPouch range](#)



While moving from cot to bed can be exciting for many children it can also be unsettling for many. It's therefore important as parents to be patient and emotionally supportive during this adjustment phase.

I need to wind down!

Preparation for sleep time is as important for toddlers and pre-schoolers as it is for young babies.

Some helpful tips include:-

- Giving opportunities for wind down time before bed.
- A sign of overtiredness in toddlers and pre-schoolers to look out for and which often is overlooked, is in fact a sudden, quick burst of energy. Parents often interpret this as a "Oh...maybe they are not so tired after all"; but in fact, it is the child's brain waves winding down for sleep, showing as a tired sign.

- Drifting off to sleep can be challenging with very busy and active minds; so reading a book in a quiet space or giving a cuddle and singing a favourite lullaby can help. Remember no screen time!
- Mindfulness audio books can also be beneficial for winding down for sleep.
- In an older child, offering times can be helpful. For example, let the toddler/pre-schooler know that there are five minutes before sleep time, then give them another reminder that there is just one minute until sleep time, so what is the last thing they would like to do?

Setting boundaries

Your toddler or pre-schooler's brains is very much in a state of flux as they are still growing and developing. With this comes impulsivity and impatience and they can find transitioning to sleep quite challenging.

This is where, helping with setting some boundaries can assist your child to transition to sleep.

Toddlers and preschoolers like to be in control and love to delay the inevitable!

By now you may be familiar with your toddler or preschooler protesting at bedtime! "I need another book" or "please another bottle" or "I want another cuddle" and so on!

Set some limits on "bedtime book rules" as a toddler or pre-schooler will have you read the entire book shelf! Usually, 2 books are sufficient with the promise that you will read more during the next day.





Create a positive bedtime routine

Common toddler sleep problems include having trouble settling to sleep and not wanting to stay in bed at bedtime.

A positive bedtime routine though can help your toddler or pre-schooler get ready for sleep, especially if you follow the same routine consistently, each day and keep as near as possible the same both during the week and on weekends.

A bedtime routine for toddlers (2–3 years) might look something like this:

6.30 pm:

Brush teeth, go to toilet, put on night nappy if needed.

6.45 pm:

Quiet time: read a book, tell a story, sing a song, have a cuddle.

7.00 pm:

Child into bed and kiss goodnight



A bedtime routine for pre-schoolers (3–5 years) might look something like this:

7.00 pm:

Brush teeth, go to toilet, put on night nappy if needed.

7.15 pm:

Quiet time – read a book, tell a story, sing a song, have a cuddle.

7.30 pm:

Child into bed and kiss goodnight.

Many children may protest at bedtime but remember you don't want your child to become overtired and therefore more difficult to settle to sleep.

Most toddlers are ready for bed around 7pm whilst pre-schoolers are ready for bed around 7.30 pm, especially if they've had a big day at preschool!

So what about early morning waking?

Just when you are in your deepest sleep between 4am–6am, your toddler or pre-schooler is not!

Early morning waking in toddlers/pre-schoolers is a very common problem and one where the vast majority of children's bodies are ready to wake up anytime between 6am–7am.

Q: What is the definition of morning?

A: Waking before 6am is usually considered an early morning waking. Therefore 6am and onwards is considered daytime. Get your coffee ready!

Before we delve into how to assist with early morning waking, it pays to fix the obvious first...

1. Check the room is dark and there is limited light exposure. Some parents like to use [blockout blinds](#).
2. Is there any environmental noise; traffic, household member rising early for work and other such noises likely disturbing your child?
3. Although most children of this age do not require feeding overnight; check that their 24 hour intake of feeds is age appropriate and that they in fact are not waking for hunger.
4. Wet nappies waking your child? Use an overnight nappy to ensure that wetting through the nappy is not waking your child.

Why might this be happening?

The main reasons that early morning waking occurs include:

1. Bedtime is too late — going to bed in an overtired state is one of the most common reasons children wake too early the next morning.



2. Child is not getting enough daytime sleep — daytime nap deprivation can cause poor night sleep and early awakenings. Remember — sleep promotes sleep!
3. Staying up too long between the end of the afternoon nap and going to bed with the belief that your child will be easier to settle. In fact, it is the opposite, and the child can be overtired. Try not to let the interval between the afternoon nap and night sleep exceed four hours.
4. Going to bed when your child is beyond the drowsy state. If your child is too drowsy, then they are most likely to not know how to get back to sleep when they move into the more alert state — including at early morning waking time!
5. Use a toddler clock in addition to the tips above. These clocks can really help young children understand when it is night-time and when it is morning by teaching them that they can rise according to the different glowing colours. “When the clock glows green..it is time to get up”
6. When the clock finally hits 6am — yay!! Make a big deal of this time and say “Good MORNING” in your most dramatic voice to ensure your child knows it is morning and time to get up.

Head banging

It’s common to see young children body-rock, head-roll and head-bang at bedtime or during the night. They do it because it’s rhythmic, and it is comforting and soothes them.

If you notice your toddler head banging, try not to be too alarmed. Head banging is common and generally never as risky as it may appear.

Most children outgrow head banging without needing any special intervention.

Many children limit their head banging until they are going off to sleep while others head bang if they are stressed or anxious.

Here’s how to manage head banging in a toddler:

- Try not to overreact when you see your child displaying head banging.
- Make sure your child’s cot or bed is safe and meets the Red Nose safe sleeping guidelines.
- Spend some extra time with your child before they go to bed. Boosting their feelings of security may help to minimise head banging.
- If this behaviour happens a lot through the night and your child also snores, it’s a good idea to talk with your child’s doctor. Your doctor or GP will check for things that might be disturbing your child’s sleep, like anxiety, stressful situations or obstructive sleep apnoea.

Tips to help with early morning waking:



1. Treat early morning waking like night wakings (see settling tips further on)
2. Respond immediately to your early riser. When your little one stirs, go in and try to settle back to sleep before they wake and protest.
3. Don’t get your little one up at this early time as it sends a mixed message about sleep time.
4. Stay with your little one as needed — not all toddlers or pre-schoolers will go back to sleep immediately. Don’t turn on the lights though, sit in a chair and they will feel your presence.



Nightmares and night terrors

Nightmares and night terrors can be easily confused, so it's important to understand the difference before offering appropriate settling strategies. It's also important to understand that contrary to their name – nightmares and night terrors can happen at any sleep period including day time naps.

What is a nightmare?

About one quarter of children have at least one nightmare a week. They often peak around two to three years of age, when children are still learning the difference between reality and fiction.

- Nightmares occur during REM sleep, in the second half of the night, and the child will wake fearful and upset, needing comfort and reassurance. An older toddler with well-developed language may even be able to recall the content of their dream.
- While nightmares are normal and generally nothing to be concerned about, nightmares can be avoided by refraining from scary games, movies or stories prior to bed.
- If your child does experience a nightmare, it's important to respond quickly and reassure them they are safe.
- If you do notice your child is experiencing frequent nightmares, seeking professional advice and talk with your family doctor. Nightmares can occur during times of stress or after a child has experienced trauma.

What is a night terror?

Night terrors on the other hand are quite different. They occur in about 5% of children aged 2 to 6 years and tend to be more common in boys.

- Children are more likely to have night terrors if they're not well. Another very common cause is not having enough sleep. A child is also more likely to have night terrors if someone else in the family has experienced them.
- A child experiencing a night terror will wake agitated while in a deep sleep — in the earlier part of the night. They may be standing, sitting, crying or screaming out, often with their eyes open.



- A night terror can last up to 40 minutes with the child unresponsive to comforting or soothing.
- It's best to avoid waking your child during a night terror. Instead wait with your child until the terror has stopped, then guide them back to bed.
- Again, if you notice your child is experiencing frequent night terrors, seek professional advice and opinion from your family doctor.

Steps to settling

Settling your toddler in a bed

When settling a toddler into their new bed try to keep it simple and consistent.

- After quiet time, give them their favourite "friend" or toy and prepare them for sleep by telling them it is nap time in 2 minutes.
- Preparation and anticipation help a toddler feel secure as does explaining that you will stay with them 'for a while' — if they need.
- Guide the toddler into their bed. If the toddler protests, acknowledge their feelings then add "...it's time for bed now and we can chat about this more after you wake up".
- Repeat the 'sleep time now' message.
- If the toddler is calm, say 'night-night', leave the room, then listen. If they remain calm, then you are not needed.

- If the toddler starts to cry but they remain in bed, try some shushing from the door. If they calm with you shushing from outside the door, just lower your 'shush' and then stop and listen.
- If the toddler starts to cry again, recommence your shushing from outside the door.
- If the toddler does not stop crying — remembering a loud forceful cry that continues for more than 3 cry outs requires attention — it's time to go into the room. They will most likely have sprung out of bed to meet you!
- Try to hold the toddler's hand and guide them back to bed. If hand holding is inadequate, pick up the toddler and take them back to bed. Settle them and leave the room saying, "I will be back in a moment".
- Keep returning the toddler to their bed if they follow you out.
- Stay a little longer each time to settle them with shushing and mattress patting. Only when they are calm, leave the room. And return as you have said you will.
- If the toddler is not calming after about 20 seconds or so and they use a dummy, now is the time to introduce it to the settling process.
- If the toddler does not use a dummy, try some quiet singing. Singing is a very powerful way to calm the brain.
- If the toddler is not calming, they need additional support. Sit and stay with them but try not to interact too much.
- Should the toddler become angry with you then it is time to leave the room momentarily. Then return and sit again.
- Reassure the toddler you are there for them. Sometimes by reading a magazine — although this is difficult in the dark — helps the toddler calm and see that you are there, but not interacting.
- If the toddler is not calming, prepare to sit with them for the first few sleeps until they fall asleep. Then progressively move the chair away from the bed with each sleep.

Key things to remember...

It's important to remember that every child is different, so be guided by your individual child and their sleep experiences.

- Sleep promotes sleep — be aware of the overtired toddler or child!
- Be kind to yourself as a parent. It can be very stressful, navigating sleep and settling challenges.
- Know there is always someone who can assist you — don't be afraid to reach out or seek a medical opinion as you need



Products you might like to try...



Sleep Suit Bag

The Sleep Suit Bag is the perfect next step from a sleeping bag as it can be used as a sleeping bag, or converted to a sleep suit using the leg zippers once a toddler is showing signs of walking and climbing. Suitable for 3M–8Y.



Sleep Onesie

An excellent alternative to the Sleep Suit Bag, the Sleep Onesie provides leg freedom and is a great option for toilet training toddlers, due to its unique three way zip. Suitable for 6M–12Y.



Pyjamas

Ideal for independent dressers, our two piece Pyjamas are soft and stretchy and come in two sleeve lengths and two TOGs for flexible seasonal dressing. Suitable for 2–6Y.



Doll Sleeping Bag

The perfect role play tool, the Doll Sleeping Bag can be incorporated into bedtime or playtime to promote positive sleep associations, routine learning and sleep cues through pretend play.



Organic Toddler Pillow

Part of our brand new First Bedding Collection, the Organic Toddler Pillow has a low profile for little necks and is the ideal first pillow for toddlers learning to sleep with a pillow and blanket.



Convertible Cotton Quilt

Part of our brand new First Bedding Collection, this is perfect as toddler's first quilt for blanket training and the cot to big bed transition. Two separate toddler demi sized quilts zip together to form a single, machine washable quilt.



Window Blockout

A completely dark room during sleep will help stimulate melatonin production, be comforting for your baby, and help prevent early waking or late settling during summer and daylight saving.

Written for ergoPouch by Cindy Davenport, Clinical Director [Safe Sleep Space](#). This content is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. If all you think about all day is baby sleep or the struggles of parenting, then it is definitely time to chat about it. Our telephone consultation service is very popular and produces amazing results. Our calls are delivered by qualified health professionals who can offer recommendations to help address your sleep and settling concerns. Phone consultations are available Australia wide or internationally via phone or Skype. [Book online now](#) or call us on 1300 775 337.