

Sleep Awareness Week

This week is Sleep Awareness Week from 1-7 October.

Just as with adults, children's sleep needs vary somewhat from one individual to another, but some general guidelines do apply. As kids move from the baby phase to the toddler stage, and then to the school years, their sleep needs decline a bit.

Yet, they still need a lot of shut-eye for their growing brains and bodies.

A good night's sleep

So what is a good night's sleep?

Well the answer depends on how old you are. For example, newborn babies rarely sleep through the night, typically waking at least once for a feed. In the course of an average day they'll typically sleep for a total of around 16 hours.

As they grow, the amount of sleep they need each day progressively falls from between 11 and 13 hours during their pre-school years to 8 to 10 hours in adolescence.

During adulthood, most of us need between seven and nine hours.

Quality and quantity

It's not just how long you sleep that matters. The quality of your sleep is just as important. Every night you need to go through several stages of sleep - falling peacefully into a deep sleep and periodically returning to so-called REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep before entering another period of deep sleep



or waking up. During REM sleep,(which is when we dream) your brain is quite active, which is believed to be due to the brain consolidating recently learned information and transferring it into long-term memory.

That’s one of the reasons why, we need both deep and REM sleep, because the right type of sleep, as well as the right amount of sleep, is so important for school children.



FOCUS: Toddler sleep: what you need to know

Once asleep, most toddlers sleep through most nights without waking mum or dad. But toddlers love to test their independence, so getting them to bed in the first place can be a challenge.

Young children also get overtired easily. When they do, they find it harder to get to sleep. Once you can spot your child’s signs of tiredness, you’ll be able to settle him to sleep before grumpiness sets in. A firm and consistent bedtime routine will be a big help.

Understanding sleep and sleep patterns is an important starting point for helping your child develop healthy habits and a positive attitude towards sleep.



Toddler sleep schedule

A common daily sleep schedule for toddlers:

- 7 am: wake up
- 1 pm: nap of no more than 2 hours
- 3 pm: wake up
- 7 pm: bedtime.

If your toddler's day nap is too long or too late in the day, your child might not be ready for bed until late at night.

Some toddlers like to wake at 5.30 am or 6 am. There isn't much you can do about this. Putting your toddler to bed later at night in the hope of later waking in the morning doesn't tend to work. Your toddler might still wake up early then be grumpy from too little sleep.

If you live with an early riser, you might want to make your bedtime earlier too.

Toddler bedtime routine

A consistent bedtime routine helps prepare toddlers for sleep. Most toddlers are ready for bed between 6.30 pm and 7.30 pm. This is a good time, because they sleep deepest between 8 pm and midnight. It's important to keep the routine consistent on weekends as well as during the week.

A bedtime routine might look something like this:

- 6.30 pm: brush teeth and change nappy
- 6.45 pm: quiet time (read a book or tell a story)
- 7 pm: into bed and kiss goodnight.

Before you turn out the light, it's a good idea to do a quick check of your child's room to make sure her sleeping environment is safe.

If your child takes a dummy to bed, you might consider encouraging him to let go of the dummy.

Taking a bottle of milk to bed isn't a good idea either, because it can cause tooth decay and lead to more problems with sleep. It's better for your child to finish her milk at least 30 minutes before going to bed.



Calling out and getting up after bedtime

Your toddler might go through a stage of calling out or getting out of bed after you've said goodnight.

Try these tips:

- Avoid boisterous play before bedtime. This can make it harder for your child to settle.
- Turn off the TV, computers and tablets an hour before bedtime, and avoid letting your child watch scary or exciting things close to bedtime.
- Set up a consistent, calming bedtime routine.
- Before leaving your child's bedroom, check that your child has everything he needs. Remind your child to stay quietly in bed.

If your toddler shares a bedroom with a brother or sister, you might need to delay your other child's bedtime by half an hour until your toddler is settled and asleep. If you're firm and consistent, your toddler will quickly get the message that bedtime is for sleeping.

Check whether your child actually needs something when she calls out. If your child has done a poo, change the nappy with the lights dim and no talking. If your child is scared of a monster under the bed, quickly check (with the light off) to confirm the room is free of monsters. If your child is scared of the dark, think about using a night-light.

Night terrors

A night terror is when your child suddenly gets very upset while sleeping deeply. Night terrors can be scary for you, but they don't hurt your child, and he won't remember them in the morning.



Lack of sleep can cause night terrors in some children. If you think your child isn't getting enough sleep, a positive bedtime routine might help.

A night terror usually settles down in 10–15 minutes, but they can last longer than this.

Moving to a 'big bed'

Most children move from a cot to a bed when they're around 2–3½ years old. But there's no hurry, particularly because some young toddlers might try to get out of a big bed more often.

You might need to move your child if your child has started climbing out of the cot or needs to use the potty at night, or if you need the cot for a new baby.

Teeth-grinding

Many children grind their teeth at some stage. Children won't usually be woken up by the sound of their own teeth-grinding – but other people in the room might be! A mouthguard may help.

Getting help

Sleep medications aren't usually the solution to children's sleep problems – there are better ways to deal with these difficulties.

In fact, children's sleep problems are one of the most common reasons that parents seek help from professionals. Your child's sleep problems will be much easier to manage with the support of a trusted child health professional.

Read on for ideas to improve sleep for the children in your care!



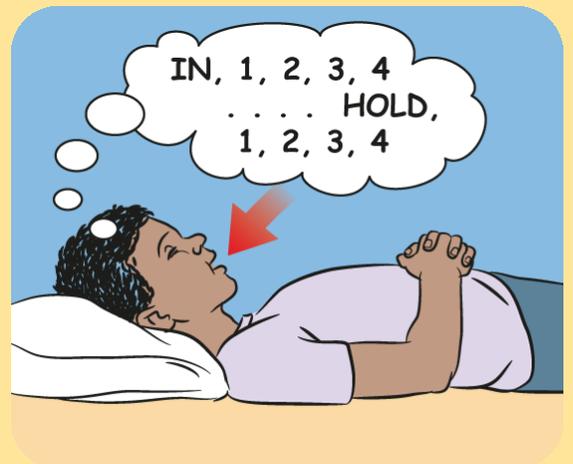
5 Ideas to improve sleep for the children in your care!

1. Deep breathing for sleep relaxation

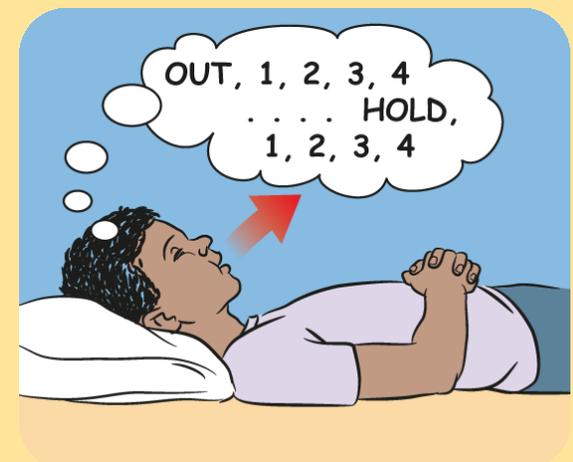
i. Deep breathing can help children relax. Bubble-blowing can help your child learn and practise how to slowly breathe in and out.



ii. At bedtime, get your child to relax his shoulders. Ask him to **breathe in for four counts** (count, 'One rabbit, two rabbit, three rabbit, four rabbit'). Hold the breath in for four counts.



iii. Ask your child to **breathe out for four counts**. Hold the breath out for four counts. Repeat up to four times. Tell your child that deep breathing gets easier with daily practice.



2. Here's a video on how to build a sleep clock with the children.



3. Use pictures for sleep relaxation

Choose a book with pictures of a place your child can imagine (avoid scary pictures). Talk about the picture and ask your child if she can see it in her mind.

The more your child can learn to create pictures in her mind, the more it can help her relax. She can use her imagination to change the picture if she wants.



4. Try a worry box. Before bedtime, your child can draw or write down his worries. At bedtime, he can put these worries in a box. During the day, you can talk about the worries and try to think of solutions.



5. Here's a Video of sleep training tips.

Resources: [Raising Children Network](#) , [Sleep Health Foundation](#)