

Parenting Together

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Benefits of a Positive Bedtime Routine

What is a Positive Bedtime Routine and How Can it Help?

A positive bedtime routine involves your child going through a few enjoyable activities at least 20 minutes before bedtime.

An effective bedtime routine helps soothe and calm your child so they are ready for sleep. It also helps your child develop good sleep habits now and for the future.

Without a consistent bedtime routine, it can be hard for a baby to settle and fall asleep.



At the end of the 20-minute 'positive period', say good night to your child and let them know it is time to rest. You might choose to stay with your child or leave the room. Either way, respond to your child in a calm and quiet way ("I'm still here, but it's not time to play. It's time for sleep.").

What a Positive Bedtime Routine Can Look Like

A bedtime routine can have quite a few different activities. The key is that you do similar activities in roughly the same way each night, starting around 20 minutes before your child's bedtime.

Most bedtime routines include pre-bedtime tasks like having a bath and brushing teeth, as well as quiet, enjoyable activities like reading a book or listening to a story. The goal is to keep the atmosphere calm and positive and to enjoy bonding time with your child.

Choosing a Bedtime

You might have an ideal bedtime in mind, but when you're just getting started, it is best to begin with the bedtime that is closest to when your child naturally falls asleep. This increases the chance that the bedtime routine will become strongly linked to sleep time for your child. For example, if you find that your child typically falls asleep around 9 pm, start with this as a temporary bedtime and work towards your ideal time.

KEY POINTS

- *A positive bedtime routine can calm and soothe your child in the 20 minutes or so before bed.*
- *A bedtime routine involves doing similar activities in the same way each night. These activities can include having a bath, brushing teeth and reading.*
- *If your child is settling to sleep later than you'd like, start the routine a bit earlier every few days, gradually moving towards your preferred time.*



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Shifting Towards a Consistent Bedtime

About a week after you introduce any changes to your bedtime routine, you can start gradually making your child's bedtime earlier (if you would like). The process involves making bedtime about 15 minutes earlier every couple of days. You do this until you reach the ideal bedtime for your child.

For example, your child has been falling asleep at 9 pm, but you want an 8 pm bedtime.

Here's what to do:

- 1. Start by putting your child to bed at 8:45pm**
- 2. Do this for two nights**
- 3. Move bedtime back to 8:30 pm for the next two nights**
- 4. Continue this gradual process until your child is going to bed at the time you want**

Shifting bedtime can take time, but a consistent bedtime routine will improve your child's ability to fall asleep, decrease sleep disruptions, and lead to more positive parenting moments.



For your local parenting resources visit us at:

orparenting.org

BEDTIME SONGS

Here are some of our favorite songs to sing for, or with, your child to help encourage them to relax and fall asleep

- Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star
- You Are My Sunshine, My Only Sunshine
- Rockabye Baby
- Hush Little Baby
- Frere Jacques
- Somewhere Over the Rainbow
- Brahms' Lullaby

The Book Nook

The Napping House

By Don and Audrey Wood

Good Night Moon

By Margaret Wise Brown

Good Night, Mr. Panda / Buenas noches, Sr. Panda
By Steve Anthony

A Note on Naps

Most children, even up into preschool and kindergarten age, still need naps during the day. Many children tend to be very active — running around, playing, going to daycare or school, and exploring their surroundings — so it is a good idea to give them an opportunity to slow down. Even if your child doesn't fall asleep, try to set aside some quiet time during the day for relaxing. The best way to encourage napping is to set up a routine for your child, just as you do for bedtime. Your child, not wanting to miss out on any of the action, may resist the nap, but it is important to keep the routine firm and consistent. Explain that this is quiet time and that you want your child to start out in bed, but that it's OK to play in the bedroom quietly if he or she can't sleep.

How long should naps last? Every child is different, but you might take a look at these recommendations from the American Pediatrics Association: <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/American-Academy-of-Pediatrics-Supports-Childhood-Sleep-Guidelines.aspx>

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References

Why A Regular Bedtime Is Important For Children

<https://www.npr.org/2013/12/16/251462015/why-a-regular-bedtime-is-important-for-children>

Sleep and Your Preschooler

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/sleep-preschool.html>

Positive Bedtime Routines

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/babies/sleep/settling-routines/bedtime-routines>