

KidsHealth® KidsPoll: Tip Sheet for Parents Helping Your Child Get to Sleep

Kids need plenty of sleep to rest their growing bodies and minds, especially as they head into the teen years. When kids don't get enough sleep, it can zap their moods, their school performance, and the amount of energy they have to play.

So how much sleep *do* kids need? In general, kids who are ages 9 to 12 need about 10 to 11 hours of sleep each night. Kids 13 and older need a little more than 9 hours a night.

Here are some things you can do to help your child get a good night's sleep:

Make a bedtime routine and stick to it. Kids tend to resist going to bed, so it's important to establish a time for sleep and stick to it. If you enforce bedtime sporadically, your child will know that you're open to letting bedtime slide and will be likely to keep fighting it.

Set up a bedtime routine that includes soothing activities - like reading or taking a bath or shower - that will signal to your child that it's time to sleep. It will also help your child get in the mood to rest.

Reading and storytelling are ideal parts of a bedtime routine. These activities will let you catch up with your child, and the sound of your voice will help relax your child.

About 30 minutes before bedtime, let your child know that it's time to start winding down and wrap up whatever it is that he or she is doing. Have your child use the bathroom, wash up, or brush teeth.

As you're leaving your child's room and saying your final goodnight, remind him or her to stay quiet and in bed.

Make sure your child has a healthy setting for sleep. Your child should have a place to sleep that's cozy and conducive to snoozing. Make sure that your child's bed is comfortable and the bedroom isn't too hot or cold.

The room should be dark, but it's a good idea to have a nightlight if your child is afraid or needs to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night. Keep temptations like TV or video games out of your child's room. Also, the bed should just be for sleeping: encourage your child to play, do homework, read, etc., elsewhere.

Darkness and the sounds that a house makes can easily spook kids. So it may ease your child's mind if you check under the bed or in the closet before you say goodnight. Also, put comforting objects in your child's room, like photos of family members, pictures of favorite cartoon characters, or cute animals. A special stuffed animal or toy might also help your child feel safe.

It's best not to allow pets to sleep in your child's room. Kids love to cuddle up with their cats and dogs, but pets can keep kids awake if they make noises (dogs can be really loud snorers!) or want to play.

Head off bedtime troubles during the day. You can do things during the day that can help your child get to bed at a decent time and get a good night's sleep.

Consider ruling out any scary or violent TV shows, movies, or books before bedtime, as they can lead to nightmares.

Avoid giving your child any caffeinated foods or drinks late in the day. If your child is taking any medications, find out whether they can affect sleep.

Find out why your child is staying awake. If you hear your child crying after you've said goodnight, or your child appears at your bedroom door, return him or her to bed right away and give a reminder to stay quiet and in bed. Say you'll return in a few minutes to check in. Make sure you do. Repeat the process, if necessary, if your child is still awake when you go back. This encourages your child to stay in bed quietly. By coming back to check in, you're rewarding that good behavior and providing a sense of comfort. And the longer your child stays quiet in bed, the better the chances that he or she will fall asleep.

Stress about things like moving, school, or family problems can interfere with a child's sleep. So set aside some quality one-on-one time before bed. By making time to read, tell stories, or just talk without the distractions of other siblings, you're creating an opportunity to connect. Even if you're not talking, your presence will give your child a sense of security.

If your child continues to have trouble sleeping, it's a good idea to talk with your child's doctor.

For more information visit www.KidsHealth.org

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