

Bedtime

Bedtime can be a special family time. Understand your child's needs and make a routine to help you both enjoy bed time. S/he can use the routine as a tool to know what to expect. Your child feels most secure when s/he knows what is going to happen.

Bedtime is often best set by the clock. Young children are VERY active and require a long period of sleep each day to give their bodies time and energy to grow. Children who lack enough rest are cranky, accident prone and more likely to get sick.

It's hard for children to change from one activity to another, especially when they are tired. Plan to limit active play to early evening hours. Encourage quiet play for 30 minutes to 1 hour before preparing for bed. Be sure to signal that bedtime is coming before you actually begin getting ready.

Make bedtime the time your child's body is in the bed. Encourage cooperation by reading 3 or 4 stories AFTER s/he is in bed and before lights are out. Be firm about the body staying in the bed.

For children who wander from bed, put him/her right back into the bed. Be silent until s/he is back in bed. If wandering lasts long, it may mean that s/he wasn't "ready" for bed. Try having more time to get ready. Start the routine earlier tomorrow evening.

Be as calm as possible about the bedtime routine. Your tension will affect your child. Be pleasant and be firm. Help as much as needed to keep him/her moving. Put the paste on the tooth brush or help with the P.J.s. Ignore the overly tired child's resistance, whining or crying. Comfort him/her and say, "You played so hard today. You must feel extra tired tonight."

When all goes fairly smoothly, your child is relaxed. S/he has enjoyed lots of your loving attention and can drift off into sleep.

Pointers for Parents:

- ✓ Make bedtime the same time every night, with rare exceptions. Changes in routine confuse children and they resist.
- ✓ Signal a few minutes before starting the bedtime routine.
- ✓ Keep moving through the routine by helping the child as much as is needed.
- ✓ Stay calm. Be gentle and pleasant even when your child is not. Ignore whining and crying. Bedtime struggles cause children to dread bedtime.