

Sleep Hygiene for Children

Preschoolers (ages 3-5 years) generally need between 10-13 hours of sleep per night, and school-age children (ages 6-13 years) need between 9-11 hours of sleep per night.

- 1. Stick to the same bedtime and wake time every day, even on weekends.** Children sleep better when they have the same bedtime and wake time every day. Staying up late during the weekend and then trying to catch up on sleep by sleeping in can throw off a child's sleep schedule for several days.
- 2. Beds are for sleeping.** Try to use your bed only for sleeping. Lying on a bed and doing other activities (e.g., watching TV, using a tablet or computer) makes it hard for your brain to associate your bed with sleep.
- 3. A comfy, cozy room.** A child's bedroom environment should be cool, quiet, and comfortable.
- 4. Alarm clocks are for waking up.** Children who tend to stare at the clock, waiting and hoping to fall asleep should have the clock turned away from them.
- 5. Bedtime routine.** A predictable series of events should lead up to bedtime. This can include brushing teeth, putting on pajamas, and reading a story from a book.
- 6. Quiet, calm, and relaxing activities.** Before bedtime is a great time to relax by listening to soft, calming music or reading a story. Avoid activities that are excessively stimulating right before bedtime. This includes screen time like watching television, using a tablet or computer, and playing video games, as well as physical exercise. Avoid these activities during a nighttime awakening as well. It is best to keep video games, televisions, or phones out of the bedroom and to limit their use at least 1 hour before bedtime.
- 7. How to relax.** If a child needs help relaxing, they can use techniques such as taking deep and slow breaths or thinking of positive images like being on a beach.
- 8. Start the day off right with exercise.** Exercising earlier in the day can help children feel more energetic and awake during the day, have an easier time focusing, and even help with falling asleep and staying asleep later on that evening.
- 9. Avoid caffeine.** Avoid consuming anything with caffeine (soda, chocolate, tea, coffee) in the late afternoon and throughout the evening. It can still cause nighttime awakenings and shallow sleep even if it doesn't prevent one from falling asleep.
- 10. If you can't sleep, get out of bed.** If a child is tossing and turning in bed, have them get out of bed and do something that isn't too stimulating, such as read a boring book (e.g., textbook). They can return to bed once they are sleepy again. If they are still awake after 20-30 minutes, they can repeat the process and get out of bed for another 20 minutes before returning. Doing this prevents the bed from being associated with sleeplessness.

- 11. Put kids to sleep drowsy, but awake.** The ideal time for a child to go to bed is when they are drowsy, but still awake. Allowing them to fall asleep in places other than their bed teaches them to associate sleep with other places than their bed.
- 12. Cuddle up with a stuffed animal or soft blanket.** Giving a child a security object can be a good transition to help them feel safe when their parent(s) isn't/aren't there. Try to incorporate a doll, toy, or a blanket to comfort them when it's time for bed.
- 13. Bedtime checkups should be short and sweet.** When checking up on a child, the main purpose is to let them know you are there and that they are all right. The briefer and less stimulating, the better.
- 14. Maintain a sleep diary** in order to track naps, bedtimes, wake times, and behaviors to find patterns and work on particular problems when things are not going well.