

Bedtime

Bedtime Routines

Helping your toddler or preschooler sleep can present new challenges for you as a parent. As your child gets older their sleep needs change. Their emotional needs can also influence their sleep patterns. It is important to create a bedtime routine that is positive and soothing for the child and family. Each child is unique and will have different sleep needs.

Toddlers

- Children 1 to 2 1/2 years of age will gradually reduce their daily sleep time.
- They often go from having two naps a day to one during this age. They may attempt to give up the afternoon nap but you can insist on a “rest” time.
- Toddlers are testing their new found independence and may start to protest going to bed.
- Toddlers are afraid and worried about being separated and may find it difficult to settle down.

Preschoolers

- The average number of hours sleep every day for preschoolers is 11 – 12 hours.
- Some children will continue to nap until the age of four or five.
- Preschoolers may use their active imaginations and worry about monsters in the dark or become fearful of potential disasters like a fire or robbery.

Parents

- Parents need to be sensitive to the changes affecting their child’s sleep patterns.
- Each family will decide on what works best for them. The one common theme to easing bedtime and sleep challenges is routine.



Creating a soothing bedtime routine

***It takes time,
perhaps several
weeks, to adjust
to a new routine.
Be patient,
consistent and
give it time
to work.***

- Choose a regular naptime and bedtime agreed upon by all caregivers.
- Give your child a “heads up” that it is bedtime.
- Plan a predictable calming routine for bedtime. Include activities like a healthy snack, bath, brushing teeth.
- Have uninterrupted quiet time; include activities like reading stories, singing songs, playing soft music or gentle talking.
- Let your child have a cuddle object like a blanket or favourite stuffed animal.
- Turn out the lights, leave a night light on if your child is fearful of the dark and spend a few minutes cuddling together.
- Don’t rush the bedtime routine; plan for at least half an hour.
- Say goodnight and leave your child’s room while they are drowsy but still awake, reassure them that you will see them in the morning.

Additional tips to keep in mind

- A change in sleep patterns may often indicate illness or other changes that are occurring in the family.
- Attend to any physical discomforts like a dirty diaper, cold or hot room.
- Anticipate requests for one more drink, one more story, etc. Set consistent limits and follow through with your set routine.
- Regular routines during the day that include lots of active play or outdoor time help your child to be sleepy and ready for bed.
- Avoid letting children get overtired or very active just before bed.
- Keep the bed a positive place for rest time. Avoid sending a child to bed as discipline.
- Anticipate sleep behaviour changes if there are changes in the child’s life like a new sibling, parents returning to work, new school or babysitter, traveling away from home. Extra cuddle time may be required during these times.

If you would like more information, contact the Halton Region at 905-825-6000, your local Ontario Early Years Centre or your Family Physician/Pediatrician.