

# PARENT EDUCATION

## Bedtime Battles

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Up to 30% of children have trouble sleeping. Only 70% of babies sleep for five hours past midnight at three months of age, 83% at eight months, and 90% at 12 months. Several factors lead to sleep problems:

Some infants older than 4 months have learned to be hungry at a certain hour after midnight although at that age they do not need to feed at that time. Find another way to console the fussy baby without feeding. Try touching, talking to, briefly holding your baby to calm the baby down. Feed the baby closer to bedtime, and don't expect your baby to stay 10-12 hours without food.

Soiled diapers changed at night should be done with little or no interaction, and very little light.

Lengthen the daytime feeding interval so the baby is used to longer feeding intervals. At 4 months of age babies should be feeding about every 4 hours. If the baby is used to feeding every 2 hours for example, increase the interval slowly by 15 minutes each day till you reach the desired interval.

If all that did not work, wean after midnight feeding slowly by 1 oz. if bottle feeding or 1 minute if breast feeding each night till you are able to stop.

Another method is to reassure the baby and yourself is by eye checking the baby when he/she starts to cry after midnight, then wait 2 minutes and if the baby continues to cry come back and touch the baby, then wait 2 minutes and if the baby continued to cry come back and hold the baby briefly, then wait 2 minutes and if the baby continued to cry come back and feed the baby. Increase the wait time by one minute every night, so the next night wait 3 minutes, then 4, then 5 etc.

The sleep association might need to be changed. Sleep association means the condition under which the baby falls asleep. Everybody wakes up at night. The ones who are a problem are the ones who require someone else to help them fall back to sleep. Put the baby to sleep in bed while still awake starting at 2 months of age, and don't let the baby sleep in your arms, or while feeding, and if this happens awaken the baby before placing the baby in the crib to sleep.

After 8 months of age babies start to know object permanence, and that you are still there even if you are out of sight, and some of them try to seek you out by crying or even coming to your bedroom if they can. Perform a bedtime ritual like reading to the child and give him/her a transitional object like a toy for security, then tuck the baby in and leave the room.

Stick to that routine and don't change it. Some children go to bed but try to ask for more things to be done at bedtime before sleeping, so limit the ritual and make it clear to the child that you will not do more.

After that if the baby cries to seek you out, let the baby cry for 2 minutes then go in and reassure the baby briefly without picking the baby up.

If the baby throws up for you to pick him/her up, wait till the morning to clean it up or the baby will throw up every night for you to pick him/her up. Typically it takes four nights to give up a bad bedtime habit.

With older children, sit by the bed reading the newspaper or a book without talking to the child, moving one foot closer to the door every night until you are out of the room. If your child comes to your bedroom, do not respond and just lead the child back to bed silently. Then you may sit by the bed as mentioned above.

Bedtime tickets help. A bedtime ticket is a 3x5 card that the child uses to get one thing at night, and if it is used, the parent takes it away and the child cannot ask for anything else. If it is not used at night the child can cash it in the morning to get something nice. Most kids fall asleep with the ticket in their hand. They don't want to use it up! You can combine that with reading 2 stories, rather than only one, the next night if child stays in bed as a reward.

Some children have difficulty falling asleep. 2- 4-year olds need 11.5 to 13 hours of sleep a day, including the nap. Limit naps to one hour. Increase daytime activities. Keep meal and sleep times always the same even on weekends and during vacation trips.

If the child still has a problem falling asleep put him/her to bed later and wake them up in the morning at the time that is planned in the final routine. Move bedtime earlier by 15 minutes a night until you get it to the time you want. For example, if you want your child to sleep 8 pm to 7 am, but your child cannot sleep till 11 p.m., put the child to sleep at first at 11 p.m., and wake him/her at 7 am, and the next night move sleep time to 10.45 p.m., and awaken the child at 7 am again. Continue to move back sleep time till you reach 8 p.m.

Some kids like to sneak into parents' bed at night. Place bells on the doors of your and your child's room. Most kids will stop if their sneaking is detected.

Some children have fears and get nightmares or night terrors. Acknowledge the child's fears. Allow the child to have their own flashlight right by the bed, so they can turn it on and look around if they are scared. Spray the closet and the room with a "monster killer spray" as part of bedtime routine every night. Night lights and keeping the child bedroom door open will sometimes help.

Check the child room and make sure that moon and outside lights are not making frightening shadows on the walls and close the windows and the curtains. Reassure them that nightmares are not real. A nap in the afternoon might help with nightmares and night terrors.

Control stresses in the hours before bedtime, like TV, loud noises, aggressive behavior, caffeine, co-sleeping and co-bathing, etc.

Finally, it is very important to remember that, no matter what the circumstances are, putting your child in your bed is not acceptable, and will only lead to more bedtime problems.