

Sleep

A toddler generally needs 10 ½ to 12 hours of sleep each night, according to psychotherapist and co-founder of Sleepy Planet, Jill Spivack. Children in this age group also require between one and a half and three hours each day, split into one or two naps.

Top 4 Easy Steps to Get Your Kid to Sleep

1. **B = Have a good BEDTIME ROUTINE:**
A consistent 15- to 45-minute wind-down routine (including bath, diaper change, pj's, milk, books, or some relaxing music) is important after a busy day. Do this routine at the same time each night and it will help create sleep cues for the child before bedtime.
2. **E = Create a proper sleep ENVIRONMENT:**
Make sure your child has no stimulating toys in his crib or near his bed, keep light to a minimum, and put on white noise to make sure your child won't be disturbed.
3. **D = Put your child DOWN AWAKE:**
The most important thing parents can do is to allow him to learn the skill of putting HIMSELF to sleep, rather than to continue to rely on external help from Mom or Dad. Although it's frustrating when he's learning, it gets easier if parents stay consistent and encouraging.
4. **S = Create a well-timed sleep SCHEDULE:**
Choose a nice early bedtime for your child. Children tend to wake up by 7 AM, so the latest bedtime we recommend all the way to age eight is 8 PM. This also allows parents to have some time for themselves and their relationship.

Spivack explains why toddlers need so much sleep: "In order for children to develop to their peak potential cognitively, emotionally, and physically, they must get enough deep, restorative sleep." She adds, "Brain development, learning, and memory are all supported by good 'sleep nutrition.' Sleep deprivation or disruption, on the other hand, has been linked to behavioral and emotional problems. It decreases alertness and physical coordination and increases emotional mood swings -- all of which can obviously have adverse effects on a child's behavior."

What Moms Can Do about Sleep

For all the moms of toddlers who are sleep-challenged, psychotherapist and cofounder of Sleepy Planet, Jill Spivack, provides her top tips to help your little ones get the sleep they desperately need.

Create a "mommy bed." I'd recommend that the parents first accompany him to his room at night before he tries to get to sleep by himself for the first time, and to make a

"mommy bed" or "daddy bed" on the floor near his bed. Encourage him to try to relax and tell him that you'll be right by his side.

Make your move. Once he's able to sleep better with his parents nearby, they'll probably want to start moving themselves out of the room slowly as he learns to become more independent in his sleep. I'd recommend some sort of reward system in the morning (when he's able to stay in his room at night). He'll probably test boundaries once he's able to sleep alone because he's accustomed to having his parents up with him when he needs attention at night.

Create a sleep book. Over time, his parents can explain the importance of sleep for his body to have energy and be strong and that they want to help him learn to get the rest he needs. They can make a little book (with stick figures) about how he gets ready to sleep. I'd have them outline the steps in his bedtime routine -- bath, brushing teeth, pj's, stories, lying down, and closing his eyes -- and that the next step is to try to rest until the morning when the sun comes up.

Stay strong. Ultimately, the greatest gift for this little guy would be for him to be able to relax into sleep and to sleep through the night, as that will contribute to better attention, coordination, focus, and emotional evenness. Helping the child learn to become a more independent sleeper should be the ultimate goal.

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