

bedtime routines

Turning Toddler Bedtime Struggles into Peaceful Snuggles

Most toddlers resist sleep. And why wouldn't they? Their worlds are full of discovery, with the constant question, "what's next?" moving them forward. So it's natural that they might be afraid they'll miss something when it's time to settle in for a nap or for the night. On a deeper level, they might also be afraid that if they go to sleep, their world will disappear. Along with a peaceful transition from stimulating play, they need reassurance that the world they know—the fun, loved ones, and toys—will be there when they wake.

Establishing a bedtime routine is the most important thing you can do to help ease the struggle. A routine can be anything you decide

- pick out pajamas
- brush teeth
- read a book
- talk about relatives or people your child knows
- say prayers
- say "good night" to siblings or pets, toys, books, and finally, a lamp.

Using your child's personality as a guide, come up with things that are calming and reassuring. Consistency is important, so choose a routine that will be easy for you to follow every time.

You have probably already discovered that when you are feeling impatient or stressed—perhaps you have work to do or are tired yourself—your child is less likely to go to sleep. Your child can feel your tension, and reflects it back to you. This will make bedtime a struggle every time. Give yourself plenty of time to move through your bedtime routine with your child.

Because children in the same family may have very different temperaments, the routine for each child may vary. For some children, a bedtime routine can be short, sweet, and peaceful. It may be completely different for other children.

Some ideas you can try:

- Have your child run up and down the hall a few times to exert extra energy.
- Give your child a warm bath.
- Talk about your day, and encourage your child talk to you. Sometimes children worry, and this gives them a chance to get things "off their chest" before bedtime.
- Leave on a light or check under the bed or in the closet. Children's fears can keep them from feeling safe enough to sleep.
- Open the door a crack, and tell your child where you will be and what you will be doing.
- Sing a song
- Tell your child it is "close-your-eyes, stay-in-bed, quiet time." Sometimes the word, "sleep" can make children resistant!
- Play some music. Sometimes sudden quiet can be disarming for young children, and calm music provides a pleasant way to transition from play to sleep.
- Children love repetition. So try reading that same story again and then once more. Though the routine or song or story may bore you, the repetition makes children feel safe.
- Bedtime struggles can often be avoided by knowing when your child will become overly tired, hungry, or worried. You can prevent struggles by making sure you begin the routine before your child becomes too tired.
- Most importantly, relax, be patient, and be consistent.

Like adults, some children have difficulty going to sleep, while others go right to sleep at the suggestion. If you follow your routine consistently, soon enough your child will realize that bedtime will become a time for sweet dreams.