

Keeping a **sleep diary** can be really helpful. For example, keep a record of any naps they have in the day, what time they went to bed, how long it took for them to settle, times when they woke in the night, what helped. This can help identify what is causing the difficulties and which solution is most likely to work.

Remember

Start a new routine at a **time that is right for you**. For example, when no other changes are taking place, when you have some support and can catch up on sleep during the day (e.g. during holidays).

Altering your child's sleep patterns **takes time and practice**. Don't expect enormous changes on the first night – your child is likely to protest at first and it may take several weeks for them to get used to the new routine. Changes are often small and gradual – so don't give up!

If you would like further help in managing sleep, then speak to your GP or Health Visitor.

You can also contact First Steps, who are here to help;

For more information, help, and advice, please contact:

First Steps
Early Intervention & Community Psychology Service

Hackney Ark
Downs Park Road
London E8 2FP
Tel: 020 7014 7135
Fax: 020 7014 7251

If you have any issues or concerns please contact:

Patient Advice and Liaison Service
(PALS): 020 8510 7315/7728

*Produced by First Steps
Clinical Psychologists
Produced Date: October 2011
Planned Review Date: April 2019*

Helping babies, toddlers and young children to sleep

An information leaflet for parents



Incorporating hospital and community health services, teaching and research

Everyone wakes in the night but children and babies can take a long time to settle back to sleep. From our knowledge and experience of working with families, here are some tips that can help children learn how to get to sleep.

Tips for parents of babies

In the first few months, it is natural for a baby to fall asleep during a feed. However, if this pattern continues, the baby may come to rely on being fed to get to sleep. You may wish to help your baby learn to go off to sleep on their own at the beginning of the night, without direct physical support from you (e.g. feeding, rocking). This can be done by:

- Sticking to a **routine** which is the same every day
- Having the last feed in a different room.
- Stopping feeds before they fall asleep and putting them down in their cots drowsy but awake (to help **break the association** between feeding and sleeping).

You may be able to **relax, settle and soothe** a baby by: giving them a safe toy to cuddle; using settling words; singing/listening to nursery rhymes, lullabies or stories; and using a musical box or mobile. If your baby cries when you leave the room, you may need to pop in and out to **comfort and settle** them. From around six months, gradually increase the amount of time that you leave them alone. The aim is to **reassure** your baby that you have not disappeared. Try to be **calm, low-key** and relaxed – this is not a time for games or stimulation.

Consider the **environment** your baby/child is sleeping in. Make sure their bed is comfortable, safe and personalised. Try to reduce light and noise. Keep activities in the bedroom to those that help induce sleep (e.g. quiet play, bedtime stories) so that their bedroom is associated with sleep. If your child is not tired at bedtime, you may need to cut daytime naps and ensure they are getting enough exercise in the day.

Tips for parents of toddlers and children

As with babies, toddlers and children benefit from **routines**, which include a wind-down period.

An example of a bedtime routine for a child:

- 7pm: Bath time
- 7.30pm: Put on pyjamas
- 7.40pm: Have a drink or snack (something without sugar in it).
Have this in a different room to where they sleep.
- 7.45pm: Clean teeth
- 7.50pm: Bed time. It can be helpful to give a warning first, e.g. "It's 5 minutes until bedtime"
Story in bed.
- 8pm: Sleep time. Tuck child in, say 'good night' and leave the room.
Resist their protests and delaying tactics (e.g. asking for more stories, more drink etc).

If your child has trouble getting to sleep, you could pop back in a little later to **praise** them for staying in bed. Then gradually increase the time you leave them alone. If your child gets up, put them back to bed without discussion. If your child wakes from a nightmare, take them back to bed and comfort them there. Reassure them and let them know you are nearby. You could pop back a little later to praise them for staying in bed. If your child is scared, ask what they are afraid of and find ways to soothe them.

Reward charts can also be helpful for children over the age of three (e.g. a star for getting into bed, another for staying in bed through the night). Sleep disturbance is sometimes caused by **changes** in the home or family, illnesses, travelling, separations, or worries (e.g. problems at school). Sensible routines help; however it may also be important to talk to them about these changes and learn what is upsetting them.

