

How can I help my child with sleep?

SickKids Centre for Community Mental Health has worked with lots of families whose children have trouble sleeping. Many families who have worked with staff at SickKids CCMH have found these suggestions helpful. Keep in mind your child's age and abilities when applying these strategies. Give them a try and feel free to add your own!

Have a consistent schedule. One of the most important things in helping your child get a good night's sleep is to keep to a routine. Try out some of these tips to get your child on a healthy sleep schedule.

- Have roughly the same bedtime/wakeup time every day. This will help train your child's body and mind to know when it's time for bed and time to wake up.
- Start a bedtime routine. Try some wind-down activities before bed like taking a bath or reading a book. These will help your child get in the routine of settling down and slowing down their body so they're ready for sleep.
- Limit naps for your child if they're over six years old. Daytime naps can make it hard for your child to fall asleep at night.
- Get things ready for the morning before bedtime. Having backpacks and lunches ready the night before will make mornings less stressful.



Create a healthy space for sleep. It can be hard for your child to sleep when they're not in a restful space. Try these tips to make your child's bed a healthy environment for sleep.

- Children sleep better in dark, quiet and cool rooms. Try to make your child's room as noise-free and dark as possible. If your child is afraid of the dark, try using a dim night light or leaving a hall light on.
- As much as possible, keep your child's bed just for sleep. Make sure that at bedtime their bed is set up for sleep only -remove all electronics, toys, books, and homework from the bed.
- No electronics before bed! Using phones or watching TV before bed can disturb your child's sleep. Instead, try a quieter, less stimulating activity like reading a book or taking a warm bath.

Teach relaxation techniques. Even when your child has a good bedtime routine and a relaxing sleeping space bedroom, they can still have trouble sleeping. Try these tips to help your child relax their body and mind so they can fall asleep.

- Help your child learn breathing exercises like counting breaths or focusing on the movement of their breath as it moves in and out of their body. This will help them relax before sleep.
- Your child might find it helpful to count backwards to help them feel sleepy. This can give them something to focus on besides trying to fall asleep.
- Help your child learn to relax their body when they're having trouble sleeping. It might help to focus on relaxing each muscle group by itself (toes, then legs, stomach, arms and head) until they feel sleepy. (continued, over)
- When your child has worries, it can be hard for them to fall asleep. Try putting a pad of paper beside your child's bed so they can write down their worries. You may then place the worries in a box, close this, and let your child know they don't have to bring these with them to sleep. The box can be re-opened in the morning and the worries can be dealt with later on.

Practice healthy habits. Having a healthy body can help your child get to sleep more easily. Try these tips to keep a healthy body and mind.

- Exercising during the day can help make your child sleepy at bedtime. Encourage your child to exercise (but no less than three hours before bed).
- Avoid feeding your child caffeine. Chocolate, soft drinks and some kinds of tea include caffeine that can keep your child up at night.
- Try giving your child a light snack before bed. A glass of milk or some bananas and peanut butter can help your child fall asleep.



Further resources

Check out these links for more helpful hints on how to help your child get a good night's sleep.

1. AboutKidsHealth: Sleep Tips <https://bit.ly/2wKTRyh>
 2. Kids Health: What Sleep is and Why All Kids Need It <https://bit.ly/2PBRiGx>
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