

Ten Ways to Get Your Child to Sleep

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Published in www.ehow.com

Do you wrestle with your child every time the sun goes down, and the bedtime hour is near? Does your child howl with anguish at the thought of laying his head down on his pillow? Is your house a frenzied, chaotic whirlwind before your children hit the hay?

Well, you're not alone. Many parents struggle with bedtime – some struggle so much that there really *is* no bedtime. In fact, sometimes it might seem like every night is spent with these overly-tired, grumpy goblins, which just might leave you scratching your head, wondering where in the world your sweet-tempered, lovely children are.

You *could* take it as a compliment – perhaps your child loves to be with you so much that the thought of sleeping just makes her run screaming in the other direction. Or, it could be a power-play, your child slyly working out a way to control the situation and stay up a bit longer. Whatever the reason, your child needs to know that **bedtime is bedtime** – no ifs, ands, or buts!

Establish a bedtime routine – and stick to it. Your child needs a structured ritual every single night, which includes some very cozy and safe activities. Find a bedtime routine that works for you both, which helps set the mood for a night of peaceful sleep. Some possibilities might include:

1. A bath. Which can be fun. But – not *too* much fun. Make sure that, although he may be splashing around with his toys, his play is somewhat gentle and calm. If you think he might get too rowdy, put a little lavender essential oil into the bathtub, or try drizzling a little warm water over his back. You might sing a soft song, while you're at it.
2. Brushing teeth. Of course, everyone brushes every night (or should). But even this small ritual helps get your child in bedtime mode.
3. Washing face and hands. A warm, soapy washcloth can be soothing, and let's face it (no pun intended) – it feels good to get all the day's dirt off and feel clean before slipping in between the sheets. (Note: If you use soap on your child's face, make sure you avoid the eyes)!
4. Getting into pajamas. Let her choose her own PJ's, and help her into them. Tickle her a little – try to make it fun.
5. A bedtime story - or two. Stories are a good way to relax and connect with your child, as well as getting him into the habit of reading – always a good thing! He'll fall asleep dreaming of far away places and magical kingdoms. Just make sure that the story you tell is fun and fantastical – avoid anything that might be remotely scary, or disturbing.
6. A song. Singing is so soothing for children, particularly when it's the voice of their mother or father. Don't worry if you think you sound terrible – to your child,

- you sound heavenly. And she will always remember the bedtime songs you sing to her.
7. Talk about your day. Take this opportunity to really sit and listen to your child. Let him talk about any subject he chooses, and if something is bothering him, let him discuss it with you. You might also want to share something special with him that you had wanted to tell him during the day, but just didn't have the time. Talking with your child is always rewarding, and makes him feel closer to you and more secure.
 8. A hug and kiss. Of course, there's nothing better to ensure sweet dreams.
 9. An everyday saying. Try, "Good night, sleep tight, don't let the bed bugs bite," or "See you tomorrow, sweet dreams," or something else to that effect. Remember it's the routine that matters – so your message can be short and sweet, as long as it's consistent.
 10. A prayer. Even if you're not particularly religious, sometimes a little way of giving thanks can put things into perspective. You could list the things you're thankful for, and ask your child to do the same. This will make you both realize what's important, and can help your child fall asleep happily.

The point is to make bedtime a **ritual**. Children like ritual and repetition, and feel safe and happy when they know what is coming – especially when it's time to hit the hay. Note: Make your child's bedtime at the **same hour every night**, with little exception.

Going to sleep at night can be difficult for a child. She might have bad dreams. She might feel lonely. She might miss you. Let her know that **she is safe**, and that you are there if she needs you for anything. Give her a stuffed animal or blanket, if it helps her feel secure.

Still not working...?

End the getting-up fiasco. Sometimes a child might get out of bed over and over again. He needs water. He has to go to the bathroom. It's too dark in his room. He's too cold. He's too hot. All of these reasons, or excuses, for getting up and not sleeping are merely his tricky way of staying up a little bit longer. You must be firm, but kind. Lead him back to bed. Tell him that it's time for sleep, and that he can't get up anymore. If he continues to get up, simply keep bringing him back to bed - immediately. He might cry. He might beg, or try to bargain with you. Don't let up, or give in. Soon he'll sleep, and the next night might be a little bit easier for you.

Be consistent. Stay true to your word, and don't sway from your decision - even if you start to doubt yourself. Children will sense when they can get away with something, and if they see that you're wavering, they'll pounce on the opportunity to stay up awhile longer. Children need to know that you are the parent and make the rules. And although she might not admit it, a child feels a whole lot safer when she knows a parent is in control. If she senses that her parent is *not* in control, then her world can seem scary and random.

Talk to your child about what he'll be doing tomorrow. Sometimes if a child has something to look forward to the next day, he'll want to get to sleep so that tomorrow comes sooner. Ask him to tell you something that he wants to do the next day, or come up with something yourself that will get him eagerly anticipating the morning.

More tips...

- Try holding and rocking your child, if she seems afraid and a little tense. Your special touch will calm her down and help her feel safe before she goes to sleep. And she'll lie down feeling warm and loved - which is always what you want your child to feel.
- If your child has trouble with nightmares, talk with him about it. If he wakes up and is afraid, sit with him and get him to think of fun, happy times, or good thoughts before he goes back to sleep. Get him to name a few good places he loves, or people who make him feel good. It will help him to get back into his own safe world, and out of the world of the nightmare.
- When you're away on a family trip, keep your child's bedtime routine as similar to your home routine as possible. Bring along any bedtime comforts such as a stuffed animal, blanket, or pillow. Put your child to bed the same time that you do at home. And bring along some bedtime books that you read with her, to help her feel that same safe feeling she does at home.
- Don't reward his good bedtime behavior with a treat, or with allowance. Bedtime is bedtime, and people don't get extra presents for going to sleep when it's time. Avoid this trap, and let the reward be a more peaceful and serene night. Your child will really appreciate it.
- Don't lose your patience. It might be difficult at times, but the angrier you become, the less likely it is that your child will want to sleep. Remember to stand your ground, but do so in a way that is calm and reasonable.

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