

## Sleep Advice bags

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## How do I use a sleep diary with my child?

It's common for children to have disturbed sleep from time to time. If you're worried, a sleep diary can help you understand what's causing difficulties. You can use it to spot patterns and make changes to help.

This activity is most useful if your child is between six months and five years old.

A sleep diary is a table that you fill in to track your child's sleep. You can add sections like:

- Date or day.
- Time and length of naps.
- Bedtime routine (time, activities, environment).
- Bedtime (time, whether they settled, what you did).
- Time, they fell asleep.
- Time slept and length of waking.
- Time woke in the morning.
- Reflections.

You can make your own sleep diary,

### Look for patterns

Once the two weeks is up, see if you notice any reasons your child might be struggling to sleep or waking often.

This could include:

- Naps – were they consistent, was your child's sleep disturbed on days when their routine changed?
- Bedtime – was this similar most evenings, how did any changes affect their sleep?
- Hours – how much sleep was your child getting each night?
- Waking – did you child wake often throughout the night?
- Settling – were there days they took longer to settle, and what had happened that day?

If there were times when your child slept better, look at that day and the day before to see what might have affected this. Do the same with days where your child struggled to sleep.

### **What can I do if my young child won't sleep?**

Toddlers and children don't always find it easy to fall asleep or stay asleep. There are some ways you can help them feel calm and sleepy. Some children might need extra support.

#### **Check their basic needs are met**

Children will sometimes struggle to sleep if they have an unmet physical need. You can:

- Make sure they've been to the toilet.
- Check meal and snack times aren't throwing off their sleep schedule – they could be too hungry or too full.
- Keep some water within reach in case they are thirsty.

Make sure they're tired

Avoid long naps in the afternoon or too close to bedtime. Make sure your child gets plenty of activity during the day so they're tired by bedtime.

#### **Sleep environment**

Your child will find it easier to fall asleep within certain conditions.

##### **Light**

Darkness helps your child create melatonin, which promote sleep. Many children sleep better with blackout blinds and curtains.

However, young children can be afraid of total darkness. It can help to use a small nightlight or leave a door left ajar.

##### **Temperature**

If the room where your child is sleeping is too hot or too cold, they might struggle to fall asleep or stay asleep.

- If the room is too hot, opening a window for a while can help.
- If it's too cold, try giving your child an extra blanket or a specialist microwaveable soft toy.

If your child wakes up a lot at night, check if their feet are cold. This is a quick way to tell if they are too cold when they are sleeping, which could be why they are waking up.

### Noise

Try to shut out as much noise as you can.

If there is a lot of noise coming from outside, calming music or white noise can help to distract from this. Some children also find these gentle sounds more comforting than silence.

### Familiarity

Try spending more time in the place where they sleep during the day. Feeling happy and safe in the environment helps them sleep there. Let them choose their own bedding, or perhaps a special pillow.

### **Activity: use mindfulness to soothe nightmares**

If your child is having nightmares, you can use guided activities to help soothe them and calm them down.

### Release fears

Ask your child to imagine locking the bad dream away in a box.

Imagine a big truck carrying the box away. Then see the box loaded onto a big ship.

The ship sails far out to sea and drops the box into the water. See it sinking down, down, down to the bottom of the deep, deep ocean.

### Relax and drift away

Ask them to tighten each set of muscles, hold for a few seconds and then let go.

Notice how the muscles become soft and relaxed.

Start with the toes then the legs, bottom, stomach, shoulders, arms, hands and finally the face.

### **Activity: getting back to sleep after waking**

If your child struggles to get back to sleep after more than 30 minutes, encourage them to get up and do something to calm their mind.

### Ideas to feel calm

If your often child wakes and can't get back to sleep, talk them through some things that might help. Ask your child what helps them relax and see if they can try that next time they wake in the middle of the night. This might be:

- Moving around a little, before going back to bed.
- Listening to calming music. Some children may prefer total quiet, so go with what works for your child.
- Reading a book or listening to an audiobook.
- Making a warm drink. This is something for teenagers or older children to try. Try to keep things dark, quiet and calm, and allow your child to fall asleep again on their own. That way, if they wake in the night they are more likely to drop off again without needing you there.

### If your Child has Nightmare

#### Things you can do

- Show and tell them that you understand how scared or upset they feel.
- Tell a soothing bedtime story or sing some favourite songs or rhymes together.
- Encourage your child to cuddle a favourite soft toy.
- Gentle touch can be comforting, but whether this helps depends on your child. Ask your child if a gentle massage would make them feel better, or if something else would help.
- Ask them to tell you about the best part of their day, or something that made them laugh.
- A full bladder may trigger nightmares and night terrors, so try to limit drinks before bedtime and ask your child if they need the toilet before starting their bedtime routine.
- Try to avoid going into the bedroom after your little one has fallen asleep because sudden noises can trigger nightmares and night terrors.
- Try using mindfulness activities to soothe your child after they have woken up.

### Supporting your child with terrors

Try to stay calm – it's likely that you've woken abruptly and are feeling alarmed. Only intervene if your child is at risk of injury. For example, if they are out of control or close to an area where they could hurt themselves.

Block access to dangerous areas. Holding or restraining them may be difficult and could make them more frightened or anxious.

As long as your child is safe, don't try to wake, comfort or talk to them. They may not recognise you and could become more distressed.

Wait for them to calm down by themselves and go back into a calm sleep. If they wake after, settle them back to sleep.

### Preventing night terrors

You can help reduce the likelihood of night terrors in a few different ways. This includes:

- A relaxing bedtime routine – this is a good first step.
- Waking your child 15 minutes before the time they usually have terrors, if it happens at the same time each night. Doing this for seven days may be enough to stop the terrors without affecting sleep quality.
- A full bladder may trigger night terrors, so try to limit drinks before bedtime and ask your child if they need the toilet before starting their bedtime routine.
- Try to avoid going into the bedroom after your little one has fallen asleep because sudden noises can trigger night terrors.
- Talking to your child when they are calm about anything that might be worrying them.

Most children grow out of night terrors, and they don't cause any long-term harm. If you're worried, or your child has night terrors frequently and intensely, it's a good idea to get medical advice.

## How much sleep should my child have

### Children aged 0 to five

Younger children need more sleep.

Age	Daytime nap	At night
1 week	8 hours	8 hours 30 minutes
4 weeks	6 to 7 hours	8 to 9 hours
3 months	4 to 5 hours	10 to 11 hours
6 months	3 hours	11 hours
9 months	2 hours 30 minutes	11 hours
12 months	2 hours 30 minutes	11 hours
2 years	1 hour 30 minutes	11 hours 30 minutes
3 years	0 – 45 mins	11 hours 30 minutes – 12 hours
4 years	–	11 hours 30 minutes
5 years	–	11 hours

### Children aged six to 16

The amount of sleep children needs decreases as they get older.

Age	Recommended amount of sleep
6 years	10 hours 45 minutes



7 years	10 hours 30 minutes
8 years	10 hours 15 minutes
9 years	10 hours
10 years	9 hours 45 minutes
11 years	9 hours 30 minutes
12 years	9 hours 15 minutes
13 years	9 hours 15 minutes
14-16 years	9 hours

## Good Bedtime Routines

### Make their room comfortable

Make the bedroom a safe, relaxing space free of clutter. A blackout blind can be helpful to keep out sunlight. Some children may find a night light soothing.

Older children can kick off or move sheets as they need to.

### Limit screen use

The light from TVs, tablets and phones is stimulating, so turn them off an hour before bed.

It's a good idea to keep screens out of the bedroom at night altogether. Older children may want to stay up late on social media or check their phones in the morning. Try storing or charging phones in another room.

### Help them wind down

Prepare your child for bed.

- For younger children, sing a lullaby as your child is settling down to sleep. Then say goodnight. If they don't want you to go, tell them you'll be back to check on them in five minutes – and keep your word. You can keep repeating this if they're still awake.
- Get your child to take a bath. This should help them to start feeling sleepy.
- Find some **calming activities** This could be colouring-in for younger children. Or try reading or listening to relaxing music.
- Tell a story or read a book. Younger children often like to hear their favourites again and again. Older children might like to read a book by themselves, or even read aloud to their parents.

### Other examples of calming activities

1. Ask them to review what went well today. This could be remembering kind words, a moment of joy, or how they helped someone else. The focus might also be on smaller things, like getting up on time or tidying up after themselves. Ask them to write these down and think about how it makes them feel.
2. If they're worried about anything, ask them to note this down too. Get them to consider what they might do about the worries they can act on and see if they can let the others go.
3. Suggest they write a "to do" list for the next day to organise their thoughts.
4. Encourage your child to say to themselves: "I don't need to worry about that now – I can let it go". You might want to help them set aside 10-15 minutes of 'worry time' each day. Outside this time, help them build a habit of trying not dwelling on things they can't change.
5. After they've let their worry go, suggest they read a book or listen to the radio. This helps gently relax the mind.

### Introduce some healthy habits

- Help younger children get in the habit of brushing their teeth before bed.
- Change their nappy or encourage them to use the toilet, then help them get dressed for bed.
- Chat together. Share how your day went, and how it made you feel. If your child is old enough, encourage them to join in. Getting worries off their chest can help them drop off quicker.
- Let your child know what's next in the routine, so they understand what you expect them to do.

Once you've found a routine that works for your child, try to keep it the same each night.

Having just a red light on in the room promotes sleep.

Using a form of white noise such as radio or fan can help your child's brain to focus and occupy mind to aid them falling asleep.

Tips for parents on helping their children fall asleep 🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟

Lavender oil on corners of their pillows.

Cherries, oranges, banana's, kale and tomatoes can all promote better longer sleep.

Less screen time or at least turn screen brightness right down.

*Helping your child  
fall asleep*

- \* Routine is key with  
any child*
- \* Set a winding down time*
- \* Bath or Shower Time*
- \* Reading or tablet time  
(screen on low light)*
- \* Try to stay calm when  
they resist (I know really  
hard at times)*