

Helping your Kids Get a Good Night's Rest

Children's developing brains need plenty of high quality sleep, but sometimes falling asleep and staying asleep can seem like an uphill battle. Whether or not sleep is hard for someone in your family, here are 9 ideas for healthy sleep hygiene:

1. **Be consistent.** Bedtime and wake times should remain about the same, even during weekends and holidays. If you want to allow your child to sleep in or stay up later on the weekends, keep it within an hour of their usual bedtime and wake time. A predictable sequence of events should proceed sleep, such as bath time and reading a book.
2. **Keep their bed a "sleep only" zone.** Though it may be tempting, don't encourage spending any time in non-sleep activities in bed (reading, watching TV, etc). If your child is tossing and turning, get them out of bed and engage them in a low stimulation activity for about 20 minutes (reading, coloring, journaling and meditating) so that sleeplessness doesn't become associated with the bed.
3. **Create a sanctuary.** A child's room should be quiet, cool and comfortable. Your child might benefit from a transitional object (example: stuffed animal, special blanket or pillow) to fall asleep in their bed. Keep electronics out of the bedroom as falling asleep to a TV or having it on while sleeping interferes with deep sleep.
4. **Remove distractions.** If your child tends to stare at the clock, turn it away from them. Keep objects within the bed to a minimum. Keep phones out of the bedroom and utilize an regular alarm clock instead of the alarm clock on the phone.
5. **Limit stimulating activities.** Turn off electronics and avoid caffeine well in advance of bedtime. If electronics must be used, utilize one of many apps available that minimize the blue light emitted from the screen and decrease sleep interference. If checking in with your child during the night is necessary, be sure to make it "brief and boring"— just enough to let them know that you're present.
6. **Exercise.** Make sure your child is physically active every day as this will help prepare the body for rest even hours later. Try relaxing yoga sequences before bed with a focus on deep breathing to help your child settle their mind.
7. **Relax.** If needed, engage in a relaxation method such as deep breathing, imagining positive scenes or listening to guided meditation. There are many relaxation apps available for kids. Offer your child an herbal tea such as chamomile, lemon balm or passion flower. If your child has a tendency to share his or her worries at bedtime, schedule a different time earlier in the day for "worry time" and keep a gratitude journal next to their bed that he or she can write in just before bedtime to turn off the worries.
8. **Go to bed awake.** Your child should go to be bed while drowsy but still awake, avoid having your child fall asleep somewhere besides their bedroom as this creates unwanted associations and difficult patterns. If your child is never drowsy at their bedtime, temporarily push it back by 20 to 30 minutes to encourage your child falling sleep more quickly.
9. **Seek help.** If your child continues to struggle with falling asleep or staying asleep, consult with his or her doctor. There may be other factors affecting his or her sleep. Your doctor may also share information about melatonin or valerian supplements.

Sources: Seattle Children's Hospital, Pulmonary and Sleep Medicine Clinic.
Dr. Jessica Schultz of Children's Medical Center of Tucson.



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There are lots of great relaxation methods that support a peaceful and present mind— stretching, muscle tensing and releasing, and deep breathing are just a few. Whether you're looking for ideas to help your child de-stress before bedtime or you're interested in starting your day off with a healthy and relaxed attitude, here are 2 easy ideas for practicing the basics of meditation:

1. **3-3-3 Breathing:** Start by getting into a comfy position and then asking your child to put his or hand on his belly. Practice breathing from the belly. The best belly breaths don't include shoulder or chest movement— just the tummy, since diaphragmatic breathing tends to be fuller, richer, and more relaxing. Once your child understands belly breaths, you can repeat the following:
 - “Breathe IN for a count of three” (count out loud for your child)
 - “Now HOLD that breath for a count of three,”
 - “Breathe OUT for a count of three,”
 - “And HOLD for a count of three.”

Repeat this exercise without pausing. You'll need to gauge your child's tolerance for extended practice. The best way to start is a quick and fun introduction that will ensure success and continued interest. With practice and depending on his or her age, your child may be able to work up to several minutes of extended practice.

2. **Deep Breathing/Visualization:** Sometimes the youngest of children struggle to understand the concept of a deep “belly” breath. There are lots of fun ways to teach this using bubbles, balloons, and even visualization. Here's a fun introductory way of teaching the concept.
 - (Hold your left hand out in a fist) “Imagine I have a flower.”
 - (Hold your right hand out in a fist) “Now imagine that I also have a candle.”
 - (Pretend to sniff the flower with a deep inhale) “Smells great! You try.”
 - (Pretend to blow out the candle with a deep exhale) “Out went the candle! You try.”
 - “Let's try both things again. Really smell the flower and really blow the candle out using all of your breath slowly.”

Looking for more great ways to relax? Check out these free guided meditations:

For ages 6 to 10: <http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/guided-meditations-for-children>

For all ages: <http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22>

