

8 Tips for Healthy Sleep Hygiene

Children's developing brains need plenty of high quality sleep, but sometimes falling asleep and staying asleep can seem like an uphill battle.

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, 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. If your child tends to stare at the clock, turn it away from them. Keep objects within the bed to a minimum. Allow for natural light to enter their room in the morning as a way to support their bodies natural sleep wake cycles (or invest in a light box if this isn't possible).
4. **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. Keep electronics out of the bedroom as falling asleep to a TV or having it on while sleeping interferes with deep sleep. If you must use an alarm clock, utilize a regular alarm clock instead of the alarm clock on a phone, which could bring more distractions into the room.
5. **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.
6. **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.
7. **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.
8. **Seek help.** If your child continues to struggle with falling asleep or staying asleep, consult with their doctor. There may be other factors affecting their sleep. Your doctor may also share information about melatonin or other supplements.

