



# Preschooler Sleep





Preschooler sleep typically involves around 10-12 hours of restorative nighttime sleep, with bedtime usually falling between 7:00 PM and 9:00 PM. While some preschoolers may still benefit from a short nap, many begin to outgrow this daytime sleep period by the age of 5 or 6. Establishing consistent bedtime routines and sleep schedules is essential for promoting healthy sleep habits and ensuring preschoolers get the rest they need to support their physical, emotional, and cognitive development. What to expect:

#### **Ages 3-4:**

- Preschoolers in this age group usually require around 10-13 hours of sleep per day, which includes nighttime sleep and a daytime nap.
- Many children still benefit from a daily nap lasting anywhere from 1 to 2 hours, although some may begin to resist napping altogether.

#### **Ages 4-5:**

- As children approach age 5, they may begin to outgrow their need for a daytime nap, although some may still benefit from a shorter nap or quiet rest period.
- Nighttime sleep remains important, with preschoolers generally needing 10-12 hours of sleep overnight. Bedtime may become slightly later as children grow older and their sleep needs evolve.

#### **Ages 5-6:**

- By age 5 or 6, most children have transitioned away from daytime naps altogether and rely solely on nighttime sleep to meet their sleep needs.
- Preschoolers in this age group typically require around 10-11 hours of sleep per night, although individual variations may occur.

# Nightmares & Night Terrors

Nightmares and night terrors are both common sleep disturbances in children, but they differ in their characteristics, timing, and the child's response. Nightmares are frightening dreams that occur during REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, typically during the latter part of the night. Children may wake up from nightmares feeling scared or upset and may seek comfort from parents or caregivers. Parents can comfort a child after a nightmare by reassuring them, providing comfort objects, and staying with them until they feel safe.

On the other hand, night terrors are episodes of intense fear or terror that occur during non-REM sleep, usually within the first few hours after falling asleep. Children experiencing night terrors may scream, thrash around, or appear highly agitated, but they usually have no memory of the episode upon waking. Attempts to comfort a child during a night terror may not be effective, and the episode typically resolves on its own. Parents can ensure the child's safety during a night terror by gently guiding them back to bed and staying nearby until the episode passes.

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Nightmares</b>	<b>Night Terrors</b>
<b>Age of Onset</b>	Typically begin around age 2-4 years old	Typically begin around age 3-8 years old
<b>Occurrence</b>	Occur during REM sleep	Occur during non-REM sleep (usually within the first few hours of sleep)
<b>Child's Awareness</b>	Child is usually aware of the nightmare and may wake up crying or afraid	Child is often unaware of the night terror and may not remember it the next morning
<b>Response</b>	Child may seek comfort and reassurance from a caregiver	Child may appear confused or disoriented and may not respond to attempts at comfort
<b>Duration</b>	Short-lived, lasting only a few minutes	Typically brief but can last several minutes to half an hour
<b>Comforting Approach</b>	Provide verbal reassurance, offer physical comfort, and engage in calming bedtime routines	Ensure the child's safety, gently guide them back to bed, and provide reassurance afterward

# Tips for Better Sleep

## Establish Consistent and Reliable

**Nighttime Routines:** Creating a predictable bedtime routine helps signal to your child's body that it's time to wind down. Activities such as taking a warm bath, brushing teeth, and reading a book can create a calming atmosphere and make the transition to sleep smoother. Consistency is key; stick to the routine every night, maintaining the same sleep schedule even on weekends to help regulate their internal clock. This predictability provides children with a sense of security and stability, which is crucial for their overall well-being. Moreover, consistent bedtime routines help reinforce the body's natural sleep-wake cycle, making it easier for children to fall asleep and wake up refreshed.



**Avoid Food and Drinks After Dinner:** Try to avoid giving your child food or drinks after dinner. This allows for proper digestion and prevents spikes in insulin levels, which can interfere with the release of growth hormones critical for development during sleep. Sometimes, children may request a snack or drink as a way to prolong going to sleep. In such cases, it's important to enforce boundaries gently but firmly, reassuring them that they will eat/drink at breakfast. Eating late can cause discomfort and indigestion, making it harder for children to settle down for the night. Limiting sugary snacks and drinks in the evening also helps prevent energy spikes that can delay sleep onset and disturb sleep throughout the night.





**Increase Outdoor Time and Encourage Physical Activity:** Ensure your child gets plenty of outdoor playtime during the day. Natural light exposure supports the regulation of circadian rhythms, helping children feel more awake during the day and sleepy at night. Regular physical activity also helps children fall asleep faster and enjoy deeper sleep. Encouraging outdoor play not only promotes physical health but also enhances mood and reduces stress levels, both of which contribute to better sleep quality. Being outside in natural light during the day helps to solidify the connection between daylight and wakefulness, thus reinforcing nighttime sleepiness.

**Avoid Blue Light and Create a Sleep-Friendly Environment:** Limit exposure to screens (like tablets, phones, and TVs) at least two hours before bedtime. Blue light from screens can deplete melatonin levels, a hormone that regulates sleep, making it harder for your child to fall asleep. Additionally, make the bedroom conducive to sleep by keeping it cool, dark, and quiet. Consider using blackout curtains and white noise machines if necessary to block out disruptive light and sounds. Creating a sleep-friendly environment also involves making the bed comfortable with appropriate bedding and ensuring the room is a safe, relaxing place for sleep.



**Empower with Choices:** Allowing children to make age-appropriate choices within a fixed boundary offers them a sense of control and independence. For example, letting them choose their pajamas or select a bedtime story gives them ownership over their bedtime routine. This not only fosters decision-making skills but also promotes a sense of responsibility and self-confidence. By setting clear boundaries around bedtime while still providing choices, children feel respected and empowered, leading to a smoother bedtime transition.



**Reflective Bedtime Routine:** Taking time to reflect on the day's events with your child before bedtime provides an opportunity for connection and communication. This reflective practice helps children process their experiences, express their thoughts and feelings, and strengthen their emotional bond with their caregiver. By engaging in meaningful conversations or activities, such as sharing highlights of the day or discussing any challenges they faced, children feel supported and validated, promoting a sense of security and emotional well-being before sleep.

