**Bedtime, Naptime, and Your Preschooler**

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**Facts:**

- Preschoolers (3 to 6 years) require a total of 11-13 hours of sleep per day. That includes naps and overnight sleep.
- Most of your child’s sleep should occur at night.
- Most preschoolers go to bed between 7:00 pm and 9:00 pm, and they wake between 6:30 am and 8:00 am.
- Most 3-4 year old children still take afternoon naps, though most give up their naps by age 5.
- It is rare for new sleep problems to develop after the age of 3. If your child has had good sleep routines up to this point, count your blessings!
- Preschoolers may not want to go to bed! They may dawdle, protest, cry, get out of bed, etc. Often, sleep problems are temporary. With calm consistency, you can encourage and maintain good sleep habits in your child.

**What’s the big deal about sleep?**

- As is the case with toddlers, preschoolers must get enough sleep to support rapid physical growth and brain development. They learn a tremendous amount of information during the day and must have regular rest periods.
- Helping your child have consistent daytime naps, or rest periods, helps your child sleep better at night. Yes, that’s right: Well rested children sleep better overnight!
- Experts recommend that children go to bed before they are too tired. It can be difficult for your child to fall asleep once he has become overtired.

**Okay, so how do I establish good sleep habits in my child?**

- **Maintain as consistent a schedule as possible for naptimes and bedtimes.**
  - Having a regular routine reduces a child’s stress and helps her know what to expect each night.
  - Having a consistent schedule also can help children adapt to other changes that may be occurring, such as the birth of a sibling or a move to another house.
  - It’s okay if your child’s naptime at home over the weekend varies from the typical naptime at daycare. As long as children have a routine to follow at each place (i.e., home and school), their bodies will adapt.
  - Prepare your child ahead of time. “You’ll be going to bed in 30 minutes, Susie, so let’s start getting ready.” Then, you can begin your bedtime routine.

- **Follow approximately the same bedtime routine every night.** Yes, every night. Choose what works for you and your child. For example, many parents follow the “four Bs”: bath, bottle (cup of milk), book, bed. The goal is to help your child unwind and send his body the message that it needs to prepare for sleeping. So, choose quiet, relaxing activities.
  - Think about it: You also follow a routine each night. You brush your teeth, put on pajamas, read, etc., and your body winds down for sleep. (If you don’t have a routine, consider adopting one!)
• Keep the bedroom environment consistent each night, and during the night, too.
  o For example, if you run a fan or humidifier, use it consistently. As another example, you should keep the temperature about the same.
  o Some children like a light left on or a door slightly open. Try to honor your child’s preferences (within reason) to help him be more comfortable.

• Put your preschooler to bed drowsy, but awake.
  o Your child should be able to put herself to sleep, so that when she wakes during the night, she doesn’t need you to put her back to sleep.
  o Calmly say “good night,” then leave. Ignore whining and protesting.

• Set limits that are consistent and reinforced.
  o If your child plays the “one more” game (e.g., “one more drink,” “one more potty”), try to cover all of the bases beforehand, and limit the number of times you allow your child to get out of bed.

• Encourage desirable behavior.
  o In the morning, praise your child for following the bedtime routine, staying in bed through the night, etc.
  o Don’t forget the power of praise! “Great job staying in bed, Billy!”

• Do not return to your child's room every time he complains or calls out. Instead, try the following:
  o Wait several seconds before answering and make your response time longer each time he calls. This will give him a chance to fall asleep on his own.
  o Reassure your child that you are there. If you need to go into the room, do not turn on the light, play with him, or stay too long.
  o Move farther from your child's bed every time you go in, until you can reassure him verbally without entering his room.
  o Remind him each time he calls that it's time to go to sleep.

• Give it time. Helping your child develop good sleep habits can be a challenge and it is normal to get upset when a child keeps you awake at night. Try to be understanding. A negative response by a parent can sometimes make a sleep problem worse.

If you would like additional information regarding sleep, consult the AAP and Sleep Foundation websites below. The book *Sleeping through the Night* by Dr. Jodi Mindell is highly recommended as well, and it contains sleep information for adults as well as infants, toddlers, and children.

**Sources:**


National Sleep Foundation. URL: http://www.sleepfoundation.org.