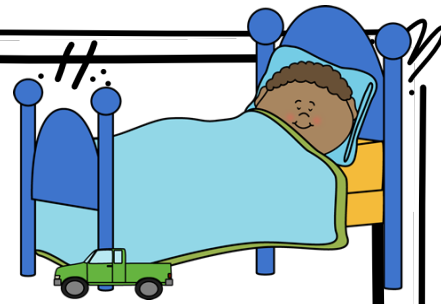


# HAVE A RESTFUL ROUTINE



Infants and young children need 10 to 12 hours of sleep daily in order to support healthy development. Parents also need to feel rested in order to be nurturing and responsive to their growing and active young children. When your child does not get enough sleep, challenging behaviors are likely to occur. Your child might be moody, short-tempered and unable to engage well in interactions with others. Lack of sleep can also have a negative impact on your child's ability to learn. When a young child sleeps, her body is busy developing new brain cells that she needs for her physical, mental and emotional development. Babies and young children thrive on predictability and learn from repetition. It is important to establish a bedtime routine that you and your child both understand and helps everyone to feel calm and relaxed.

## Bedtime Strategies

1. **Watch for and acknowledge your child's signs of sleepiness.** Your child might pull on his ears, rub his eyes or put his head on your shoulder. For example, you can say, "I see you rubbing your eyes. You look sleepy. Let's get ready for bed." Teaching your child to label and understand body cues will help him to use language instead of challenging behavior (e.g., whining, crying or temper tantrums) to communicate his needs.
2. **Use a visual schedule made with photos, clipart or other objects to help your child see the steps of the bedtime routine.** A visual schedule can help her to understand the steps and expectations of the routine.
3. **Provide your child with activities, sounds or objects that help him feel calm and restful during the hour before bedtime.** Make these activities part of your nightly routine. For example, reading books, listening to soft, calming music, holding a favorite blanket or stuffed animal will all help your child to understand that it is time to calm down and prepare for sleep.
4. **Tell your child what will happen when she wakes up.** Your child may be resistant to going to sleep because she does not want to miss out on an activity or the day to come to an end. Reassure your child that tomorrow will be filled with more fun and special time. You can also include tomorrow's activity on the visual schedule (e.g., provide a picture of your child's teacher or preschool).
5. **Give your child undivided and unrushed attention as you prepare him for bed.** Bedtime can be a positive experience filled with quality time for you and your child.

## The Bottom Line

Bedtime is a daily opportunity for you to build and nurture a positive relationship with your child. Predictable routines make children feel safe and secure. When you provide a predictable bedtime routine, you are teaching your child the skills she needs to relax and transition from the busy activity of the day to preparation for sleep. When your child is able to get a restful sleep, you will also feel more calm and rested. A successful bedtime routine that you follow regularly will help prepare you both for shared days of family fun and learning. ✨

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Source: University of West Florida [www.challengingbehaviors.org](http://www.challengingbehaviors.org)

